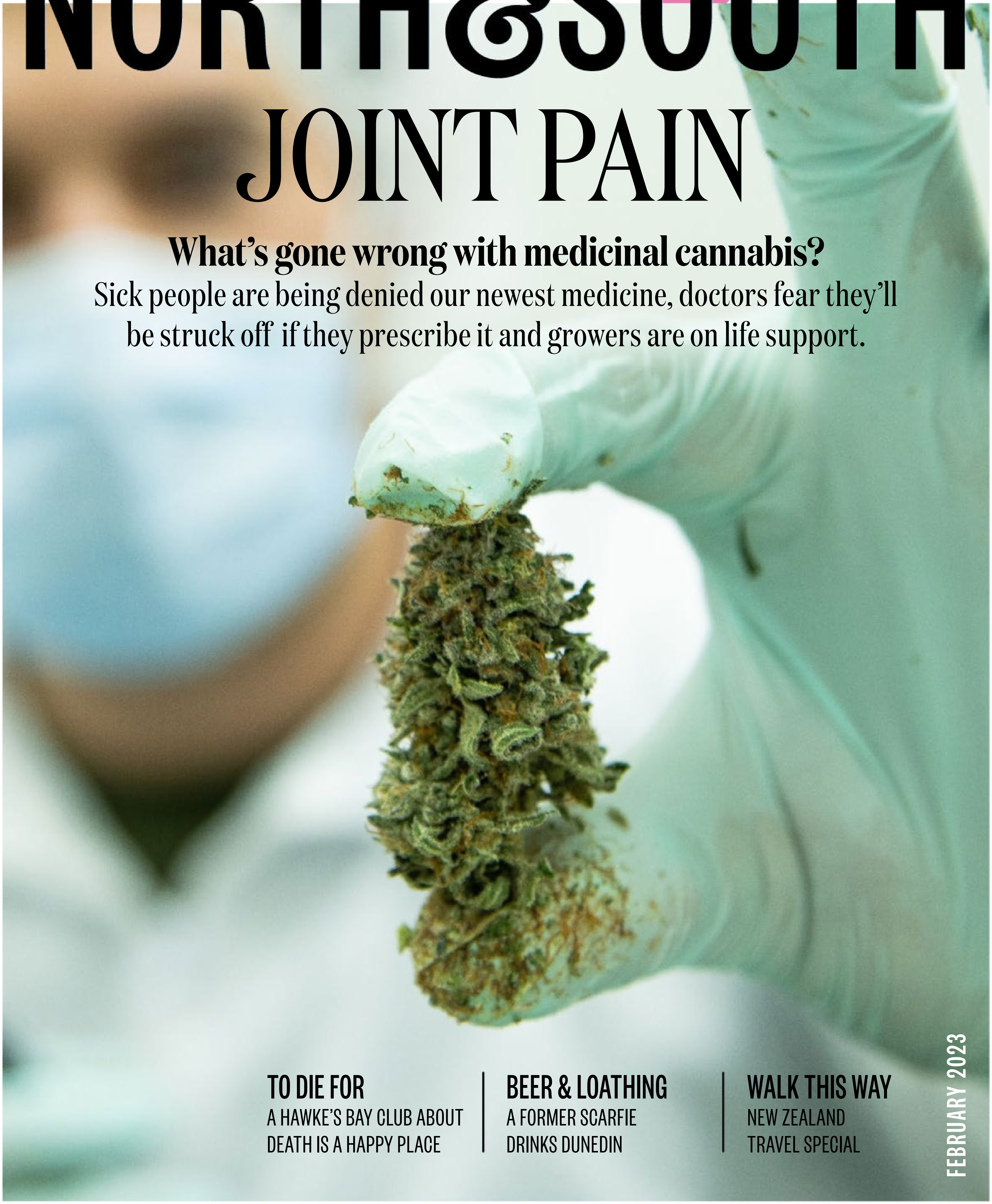
ENTER THE DRAGON

China's power play in the Pacific

NORTH&SOUTH



JOINT PAIN

What's gone wrong with medicinal cannabis?

Sick people are being denied our newest medicine, doctors fear they'll be struck off if they prescribe it and growers are on life support.

TO DIE FOR
A HAWKE'S BAY CLUB ABOUT DEATH IS A HAPPY PLACE

BEER & LOATHING
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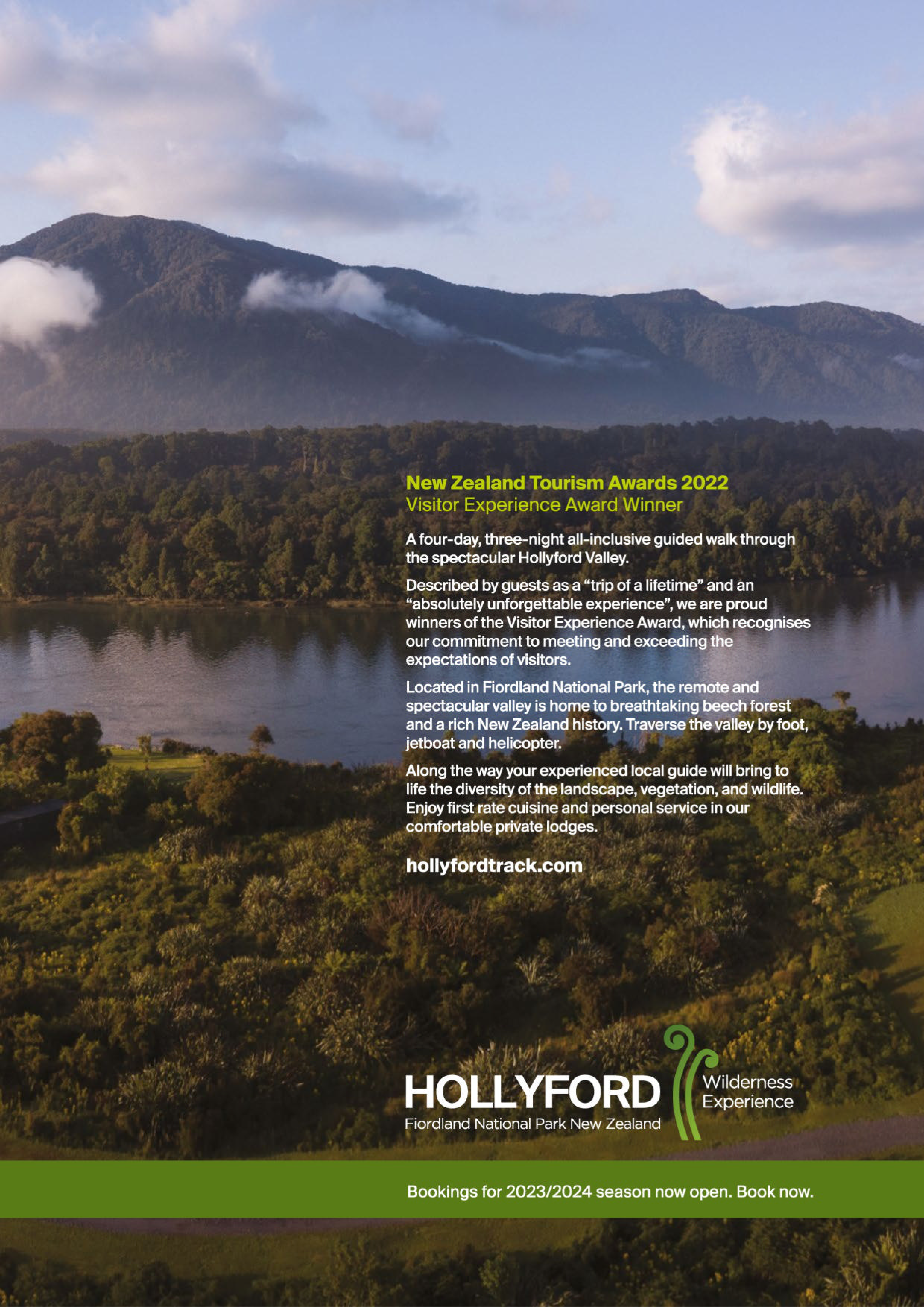

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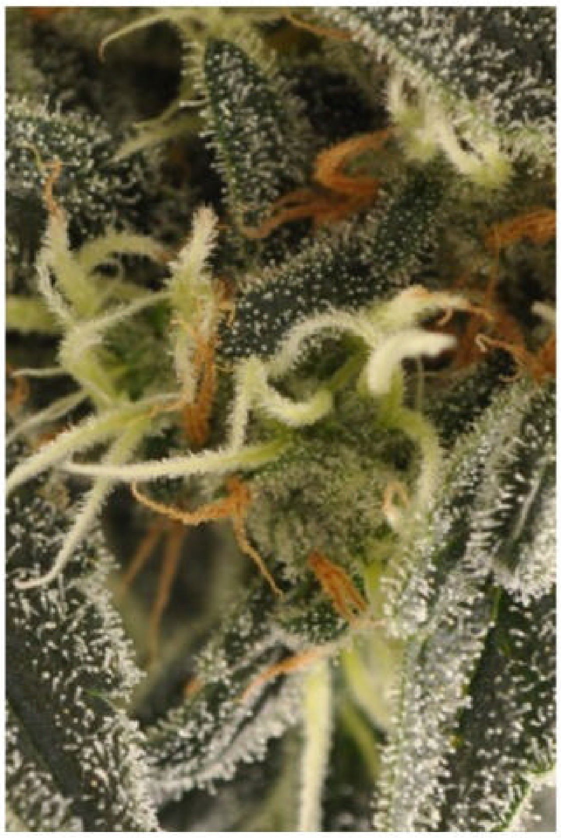
In this Issue

On the Cover



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UP IN SMOKE

George Driver

Legalising medicinal cannabis after a century of prohibition was supposed to be a bold step forward — and a big money maker for our local economy. But regulatory hitches mean that the nascent industry is floundering and many doctors won't prescribe cannabis, fearing legal ramifications. What went wrong?

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Andy Spain

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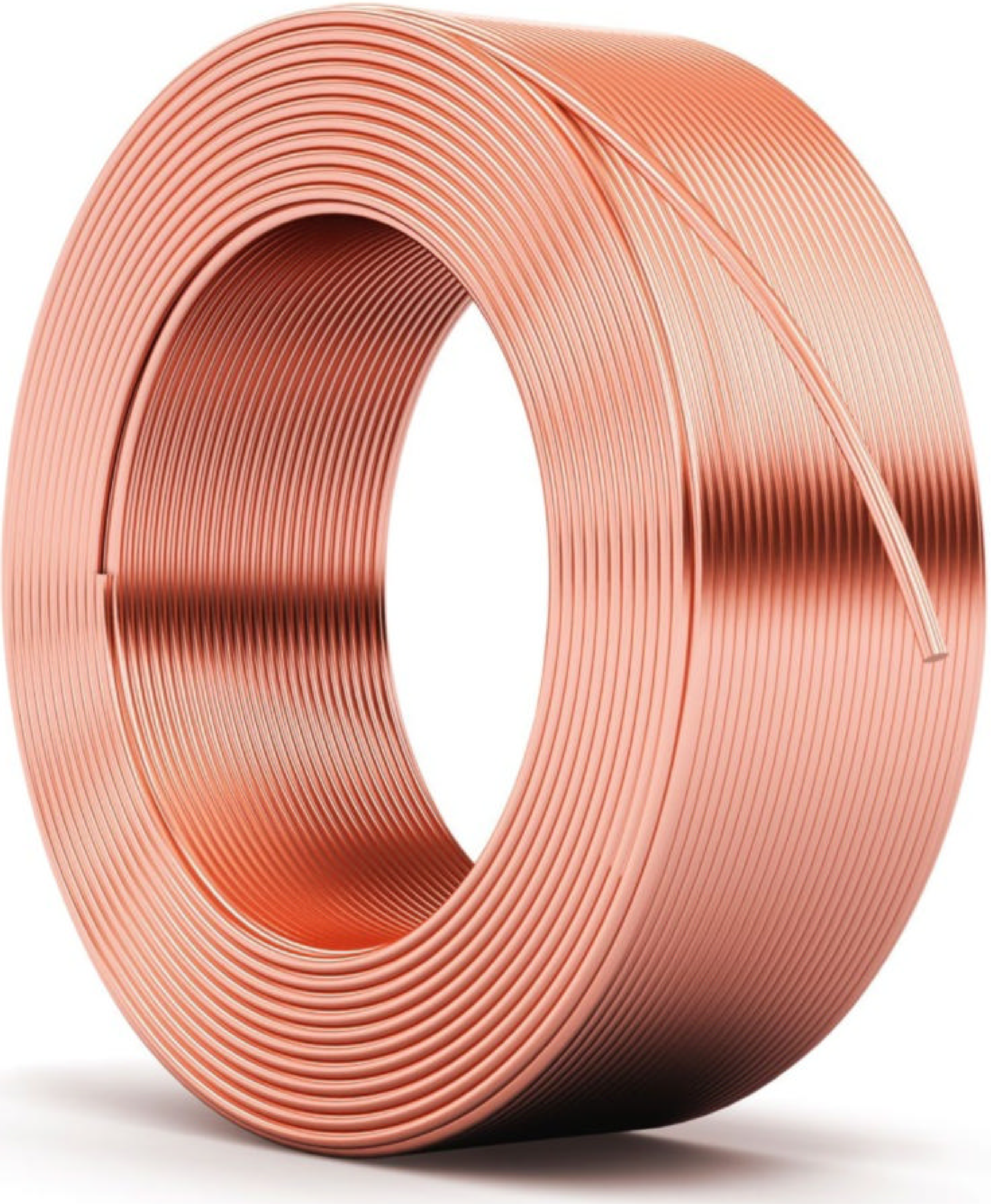
LEFT PHOTO COURTESY PURE ISOLATION; RIGHT PHOTO BY ANDY SPAIN

From copper to corn, commodity prices have been rising sharply around the world. So what's the outlook for Australia's huge commodities sector?



Wallabies legend and commodities expert Nick Farr-Jones joined us on The Monday Call to give us his perspective from across the Tasman. Available on demand wherever you get your podcasts.

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A new father ponders his priorities during a raucous beer festival in his old student-days stomping ground.

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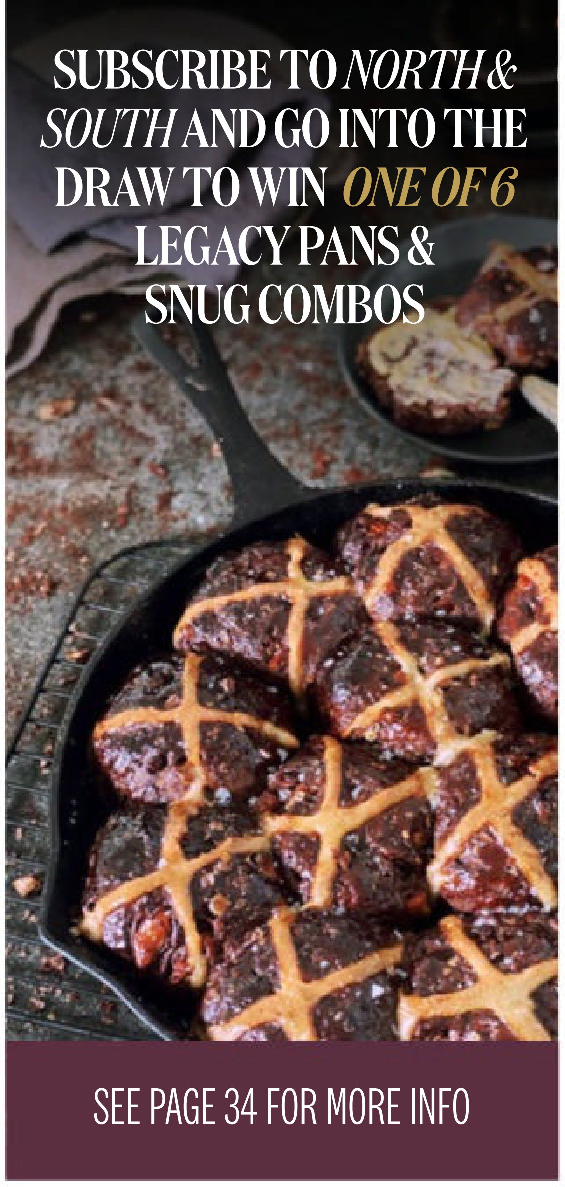
The return of the Motunui epa carved panels, Ruby Tui's hit memoir, a biography of a New Zealand communist and a novel set in Birkenhead are among this month's reviews.



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SEE PAGE 34 FOR MORE INFO

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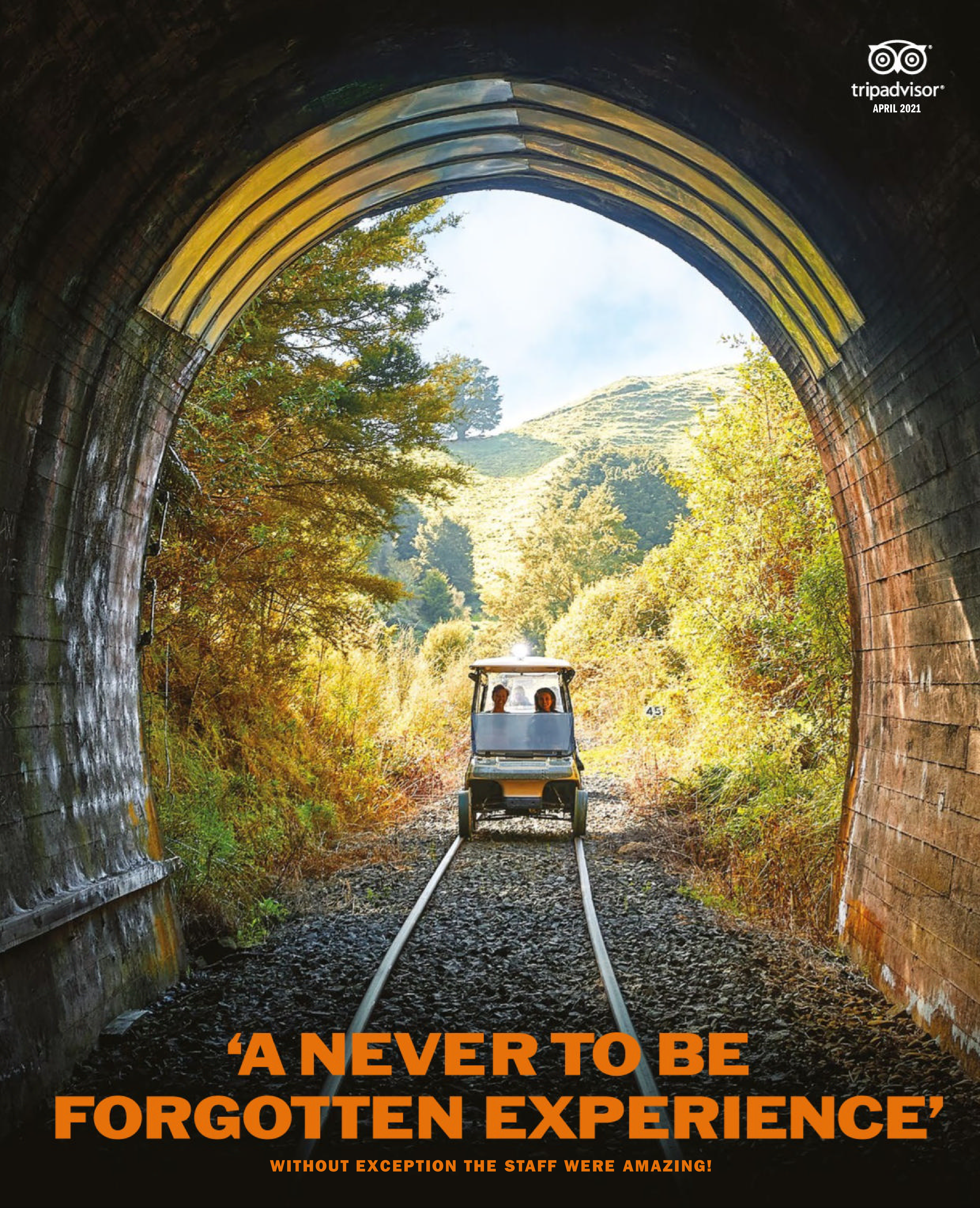
MEET THE MAKER

Auckland artist Benjamin Work shows us around his east Auckland studio. Photographed by Vanessa Green.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: GORSE BY THOMAS MCLEAN; BENJAMIN WORK BY VANESSA GREEN; CRUISING IN FIRDLAND BY I WILSON, COURTESY HERITAGE EXPEDITIONS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'A NEVER TO BE FORGOTTEN EXPERIENCE'
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FORGOTTEN WORLD
ADVENTURES

From the Editor

In this issue, we cover the kinds of big topics that are in *North & South*’s DNA — in this case, what’s going wrong with the newly established medicinal cannabis industry, China’s big-spending presence in Samoa, and a dive into California’s Esalen Institute, which has had outsize influence in the field of personal development for 60 years. And we’re also having some fun too. Holding on to that holiday feeling as long as possible, we’re rich with adventure this month.

Journalist and seafaring enthusiast John McCrystal took a cruise on our behalf, boarding Heritage Expeditions’ *Heritage Adventurer* in Tauranga for a voyage that ended in Bluff. It did rain a bit, but this is New Zealand so that wasn’t entirely unexpected and John found plenty of worthwhile diversions both onboard and onshore. His story is on page 70.

North & South deputy editor Tess Nichol laced up her hiking boots for her adventure: a four-day walk on the Hollyford Track in Fiordland. Her tale of the area’s poignant colonial history and the awe-inspiring natural beauty of the trail might well inspire others to follow in her footsteps (page 76).

Our art director, Imogen Greenfield, also left her desk for a sojourn in Queenstown (which is also a great place to pause after the Hollyford). Imogen is a hugely talented illustrator so I asked her to take her drawing kit with her. Her delightful vignettes of herself in various guises for her southern stay bring a very special element to the story (page 79).

Keeping to Te Wai Pounamu, John Woolf has an enjoyable return visit to Blackball (page 82), and hilariously, our South Island correspondent, George Driver, found he was not as match-fit as he was in his scarfie days when he went back to Dunedin for the student association-run Dunedin Craft Beer and Food Festival. He had a very good time, and while Imogen did “enhance” George’s photos from the event very slightly, they were of the standard you may expect after a long day sampling some of the finest craft ales around.

I made my own visit to Ōtepoti Dunedin too, in December, for my daughter’s graduation from the University of Otago. By coincidence, at the very same ceremony our food editor, Alice Taylor, above on right, graduated with her Master of Politics (with Distinction — her dissertation was titled “Architect or Strategic Beneficiary? Explaining Taiwan’s Survival, 1979–2016”). You can’t beat Dunedin on a good day, and as the sun shone in a clear blue sky, the bagpipes played and the graduands paraded through the newly refurbished central city, it was easy to forget the tempest of the past three years and think only of bright futures ahead. *Semper sint in flore!*

Kirsty

Kirsty Cameron

PHOTOS: TOP CAROLYN HASLETT; MIDDLE SUPPLIED. ILLUSTRATION: IMOGEN GREENFIELD

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HAF_2005_N&S_A

Conversation

Viva Vietnam

I am fortunate to work for the largest independent asset-management firm in Vietnam. During the last 15 years, I have seen incredible changes in its capital markets and growth of the economy. One key message we repeatedly tell investors is that Vietnam is a country, not a war.

Your article "Our Man in Saigon" (by Pete McKenzie, January) was a fascinating glimpse through the eyes of the players during a chaotic moment in history. The war in Vietnam still clearly resonates and should never be forgotten. However, what might have also been interesting for your readers is to understand how Vietnam has developed as a nation since then, and to discuss the incredible progress which has been made.

For example, Vietnam has one of the fastest cases of poverty reduction – from 70 per cent in the mid-1980s to 19 per cent in 2007. This was done through reforms introduced in the 1980s called "Doi Moi". Post-war diplomatic isolation had caused hardship, the country was starving and something had to be done. Land was divided up into small holdings and by 1989 Vietnam was not only feeding itself but exporting excess crops and on its way to being among the world's largest exporters of cashew nuts, coffee and rice.

This was followed with other legal and macro-economic reforms which have benefited the youthful population of 98 million. Vietnam's middle class, expected to grow by 37 million by 2030, has fuelled domestic consumption which has been a key driver of economic success. Becoming an export powerhouse, largely an outcome of foreign direct investment, is also the result of the well-documented "supply-chain shift" away from China.

Vietnam has signed numerous global trade deals and many of them, like CPTPP, include New Zealand. Our Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, was recently hosted by Vietnam's Prime Minister, Pham Minh Chinh, at a state dinner while in Vietnam with New Zealand Trade and Enterprise, which hopes to see US$2 billion in two-way trade by 2024.

Despite GDP growing on average 6.5 per cent since 2000, it's not all about the economy. Vietnam has one of the highest rates of education in Asia, there is gender parity – both boys and girls achieve over 95 per cent in literacy – and this has translated to one of the highest rates of female participation in corporate and government leadership in Asia. It's a beautiful country with 34 national parks, incredible beaches and a cultural heritage going back over 2000 years.

Communism may have won the war, but that's not the only thing worth reading about, especially on an iPhone assembled in Vietnam.

Ailsa Cuthbert, Gisborne
Letter of the Month

Bouquets and Warm Wishes

I just want to thank you and your editorial team for the wonderful articles that you presented to us readers over 2022. I just do not know how you can dream up such interesting material and place it to the readers, it must be a native ability to do so.

READER LETTER WINNER

This month's best letter wins a Blooming Braid from Metal Metcalfe, valued at $395. At approximately 170cm long and with two fixing points, this piece is perfect for both interior and exterior settings.

Hawke's Bay based artists and sisters, Katie and Amy are METcALfe (Metal Metcalfe), creating joyful metal artworks from repurposed 44 gallon steel drums. They demonstrate their unique solutions reusing this waste material, giving it new life and value.

Visit **metalmetcalfe.com** for more information.

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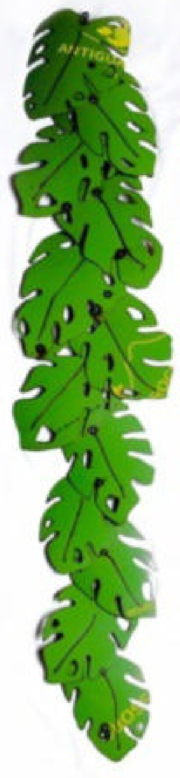
Sisters in Steel



FULL ARTWORK

I always look forward to an issue and the latest with the "forgotten railway" ("On the Line" by John Summers, January) is typical of what is so interesting to read. I did the trip last year and rank it as in the top 10 for tourist attractions here in New Zealand. Thanks again for your material, it is gratefully received I can assure you.

I take this opportunity to wish you and your team a very Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Warren Duff, North Canterbury

I have been a subscriber to *North & South* since its early days. Over all of these years I have, generally, appreciated the content, particularly the in-depth articles on current and challenging topics that get limited cover elsewhere (the exception was the period where notable murder cases have been revisited with some frequency).

It is my view that *North & South* has developed into a much stronger publication consequent to your new publishers having taken control, so thanks to Verena Friederike Hasel and Konstantin Richter for picking up the challenge when Bauer Media withdrew.

I look forward to continuing stimulating reading.

Kevin Steel, Te Awamutu

Uncle Graham Will Be Amused

According to our family folklore, my uncle, Professor J G Mortimer, was one of the infamous students who hatched the UFO plan from Knox College.

Uncle Graham, now aged 90, still lives in Dunedin in his own home so I am surprised to read (in "The Fantastically Grand Interplanetary Hoax" by Ruth Nichol, January) that he could not be traced. He would be thrilled to hear from Ruth, I'm sure, to relive past hijinks.

Thanks for the great reads.

Gretchen Mark-Dear, Queenstown

Another Side of Children in Care

I cannot thank Aaron Smale enough for such an excellent article ("The Misery-Go-Round", September). Having had well over 15 years' experience with Oranga Tamariki as a foster parent, it is a very worthwhile read.

What readers also need to keep in mind is, as deplorable as OT can be with families they've taken kids off, they're certainly no better with the families they put these kids with. It is an ill-informed and utterly unaccountable bureaucracy.

As for the Commission into Abuse in State Care: after reading Aaron's story, I'm glad we didn't pursue our involvement. Not that the commissioner we initially met with followed up with us.

The Family Court system is also broken. Having appeared in court multiple times now, it is a thoroughly disempowering and adversarial system that neither considers the whole person (the child) or family.

I couldn't agree more with Elison Mae's comments, where she said that until political leaders, community and government agencies,and society as a whole truly recognise the overlapping nature of the multiplicity of issues around child welfare and protection (poverty, housing, health, education, shocking racism, the list goes), we as a country will continue to make very little, if any, progress.

Blair Donkin, Dunedin

Peerless Big Norm

When I was studying law at the Victoria University of Wellington, some evenings I would listen to Parliament on my cheap radio, and hear MP and then Prime Minister Norman Kirk's booming voice fill the airwaves. I kept on listening for an hour — as an orator he had no peer ("The Kirk Legacy" by Ollie Neas, December). Ollie Neas's missive gets to the essence of big Norm Kirk.

Brian Collins, Petone

Unbalanced Scales of Justice

In 2007, I was summoned as a juror and served in a four-day trial. At the time I was mainly self-employed but also worked one day a week for wages. The payment then was $31 per half day, so I had to remit one-fifth of that back to my employer, since my employer still paid me my one day's wage. My self-employed self was therefore compensated $198.40 for the entire four days, while my earnings were zero.

My husband just got a jury summons, which he has claimed exemption from because we are sole proprietors of our own two-person business. He earns his living not from wages or salary but from contracting. If he doesn't work he doesn't get paid. We were disgusted to see that the juror compensation rate is still $31 per half day. It has not changed in all that time.

For a self-employed person or contractor the juror compensation is even more insulting than ever, equating to far less than the minimum wage, so self-employed people would be mad to willingly serve on a jury. What a waste of good brains! The letter with the summons says "The fee is to thank you for your service. It's not meant to replace your wage or salary." When will the justice system wake up to the fact that lots of people are no longer on a wage or salary? A more equitable system of compensation is desperately needed.

Jackie Hoffman, Nelson

Join the conversation with *North & South*: Letters to the editor must include the writer's full address (not for publication). Letters and emails of less than 400 words are preferred; they may be edited for space and clarity. Please send your submission titled "Letter to the Editor" to: **North & South** PO Box 147098; Ponsonby Box Lobby Auckland 1144. Or email us: info@northandsouth.co.nz

Featured Contributors

Peter Bale

Peter Bale is a New Zealander who has spent many years away from home but is fascinated by how the country can punch above its weight. He writes the "Foreign Correspondence" column, bringing interesting voices into it while reserving the right to do a little commentary. He is a former Reuters correspondent and editor and has had senior roles at the *Financial Times*, News Corp, Microsoft and CNN. He was the chief executive of the investigative-journalism group, the Center for Public Integrity, whose International Consortium of Investigative Journalists arm published the Panama Papers.

John McCrystal

John McCrystal has been working as a freelance writer for the last 25 years. He has written, co-written and ghost-written over 50 non-fiction books, including a collection of stories of disaster and survival arising from shipwrecks, both in New Zealand and abroad. Nevertheless, he will never turn down an opportunity to go to sea, and having ventured twice into the Southern Ocean and to Antarctica with Heritage Expeditions, the opportunity to join a coastwise voyage aboard the new *Heritage Adventurer* was a dream assignment. (See John's account of the *Adventurer*'s maiden voyage on page 70.)

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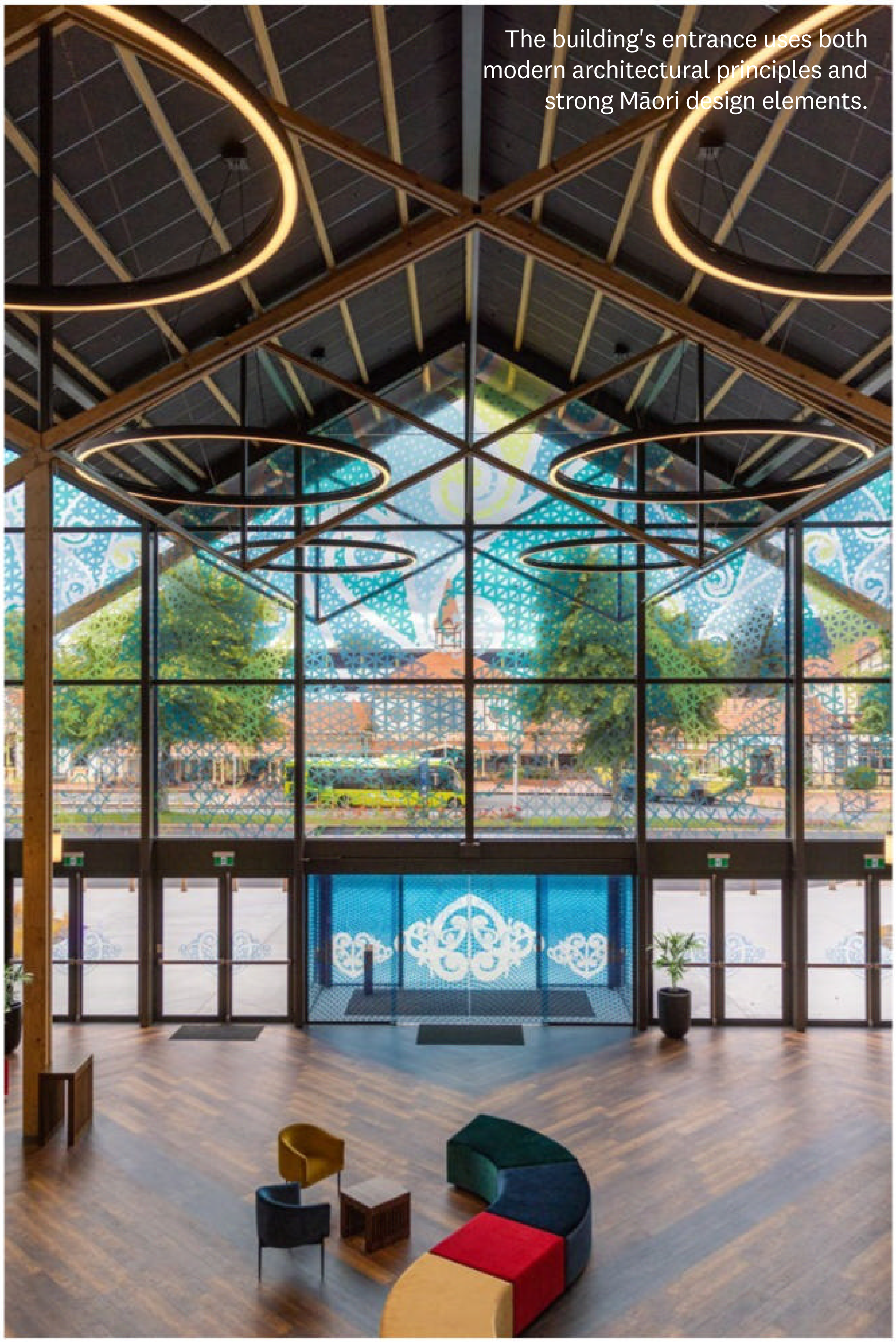
N E

Four Corners

W S

Sir Howard honoured in his hometown, Karen Walker's Katikati connection, keeping time around the motu, and more



The building's entrance uses both modern architectural principles and strong Māori design elements.

HOUSE OF DREAMS

A refurbished arts centre does more than honour a legendary performer – it provides opportunities for rangatahi in Rotorua and beyond.

By Ben Mack

"Dad was a man of the people," says Donna Morrison (Te Arawa), her voice echoing in a large studio above the foyer in the newly refurbished venue named for her late father, the legendary entertainer Sir Howard Morrison. "This building represents his Ngāti Whakaue whakapapa, where he comes from."

Built for the Rotorua Borough Council in 1938, on land gifted by Ngāti Whakaue, the building originally known as the Municipal Office and Theatre — comprising an administration wing, concert chamber and the Regent Theatre auditorium — was rendered in a Spanish Mission style, designed by the influential English-born architect Edmund Anscombe. It was refurbished in the 1990s and given a new name, the Rotorua Convention Centre. In 2014, five years after Sir Howard's death, it was again renamed, as the Sir Howard Morrison Performing Arts Centre.

The previous building was well-loved, if a little dated in appearance. Its curved white façade and pillared entrance might have had it mistaken for a courthouse, or the reception area of a four-star hotel instead of the best place in town to catch a live performance. In any case, in late 2017, it closed its doors — a seismic assessment had discovered the building wasn't up to earthquake safety codes.

During the five-odd years it was shut, the impact of the centre's loss on Rotorua was obvious in the limited opportunities for performances in the city, as well in the scuppering of programmes offering activities for young people. But a plan was hatched: instead of demolishing it, the building and its three performance spaces would be earthquake strengthened and refurbished to better represent mana whenua and the people of Rotorua, providing something the community could be proud of and see themselves reflected in.

A partnership was established

The late Sir Howard Morrison, at the Station Hotel in Beach Rd, Auckland, 1971.

PHOTO AUCKLAND LIBRARIES HERITAGE COLLECTIONS 1269-1971129-13

between the Morrison whānau, Te Arawa iwi (including Ngāti Whakaue as hapū) and Rotorua Lakes Council. Of the $33.7 million renovation cost, the council contributed about $22.6 million, with the remainder coming from charity trusts and boards, including $3 million from philanthropist businessman Sir Owen Glenn, in memory of Sir Howard, his friend.

The restoration work began in October 2020, and the building will officially open in February, with a two-day gala featuring artists such as Anika Moa (Ngāpuhi, Te Aupōuri), jazz singer Whirimako Black (Tūhoe, Ngāti Tuwharetoa, Ngāti Ranginui), Te Mauri Kapa Haka group, circus performers and Howard Morrison's son, Howie Morrison Junior (Te Arawa).

The changes in the building's design are striking. At the front entrance, the columns and covered area have been replaced with a slanted design signifying the coming together of multiple winds, which is intended to reflect the way the venue will bring people together. "It brings to mind a vision of manu tioriori, the rising of a voice into a space," says Henriata Nicholas (Ngāti Whakaue), who was the building's cultural-design lead. "This is something that's been needed in the community for a long, long time. Building this shows a willingness to work with and edify mana whenua and iwi and support culture."

Nicholas works for the cultural kaitiaki group, Te Pae Arataki, which served as the chief advisory panel for the project. She says the designs are meant to uplift people, particularly mana whenua. Inspiration for the swirling patterns in the large front windows comes from a Ngāti Whakaue puhoro design highlighting growth, strength, resilience and persistence. Curving patterns in the glass along the lower doors form a mangōpare — hammerhead shark. The entire entrance seems to glow from within when light shines on it.

Technical manager Kevin Greene led much of the technical redesign, which was made especially challenging by the prevalence of hydrogen sulphide. The gas is what gives Rotorua its distinctive odour, but it also causes rapid deterioration in electrical materials and equipment — the team had to work around this, such as by using wireless networks as much as possible instead of running wires through copper piping when assembling the audio and lighting systems.

The public will experience for themselves how the new equipment works during the grand opening gala, but it's the centre's uses after the gala which are most exciting for both locals and the team behind the renovations.

Kapa haka performances will be held here, and there is hope that such a state-of-the-art upgrade

The Sir Owen Glen Theatre, right, had some seating restored, lost during a prior refurbishment in the 1990s.

will help to shift narratives and negative stereotypes about Rotorua by providing opportunities for rangatahi in the community to do positive things through the performing arts. As Donna Morrison says, "There is a saying, 'He toi whakairo, he mana tangata' – where there is artistic excellence, there is human dignity."

As well as kapa haka, there are plans to hold workshops, a free Friday night music programme, a festival for local artists and civic events such as Anzac Day commemorations and school/kura prizegivings. National and international acts will also be able to hire the venue.

Hinerongonui Kingi (Ngāti Pikiao), performing arts programme delivery manager, explains the importance of changing perceptions of Rotorua, and how the venue helps. "Manaakitanga is such a huge thing to start from. Stories can be born, kept alive and spread with this venue."

Kingi says stories can include the history of tangata whenua in Rotorua, and new stories from performers that can help lift and give back to the community. "I was performing here [in Rotorua] since I was five years old," she says. "This is now a community whare. I had to move to Wellington to further my career, but now Rotorua rangatahi won't have to."

Rotorua mayor Tania Tapsell (Te Arawa) says the facility's upgrade means more talent can be fostered locally and "help to grow their aspirations and experience to be international performers as Sir Howard was". Tapsell is Sir Howard Morrison's great niece — her grandmother, Judy Tapsell, is his sister.

As for Donna Morrison, she believes the official opening is a moment her father would be proud of. "We have a legacy where the old has been transformed," she says. "When the kaupapa is right, the people will come." ■

Fast facts: Sir Howard Morrison Centre

3 — number of performing spaces

3 — number of studios

300 — capacity of Te Haumako / Black Box Theatre

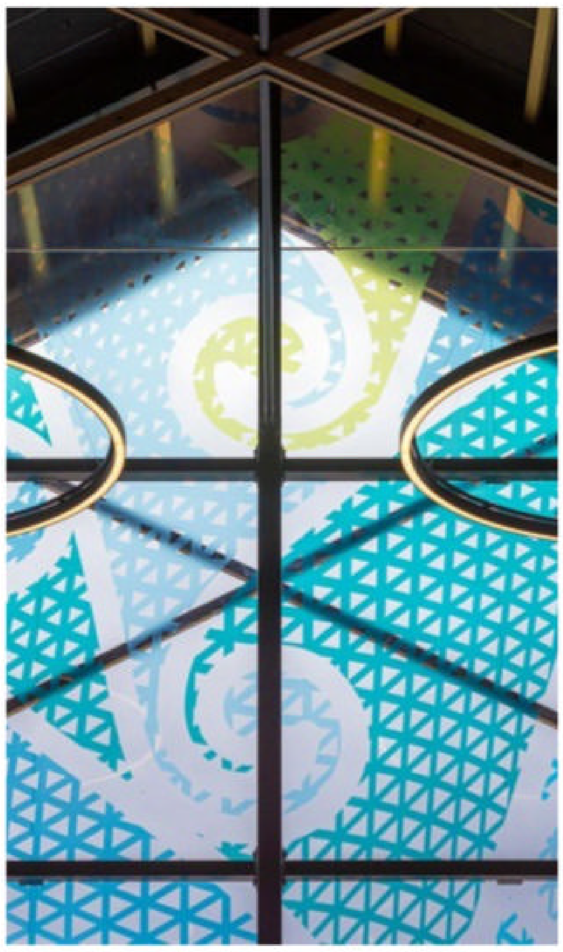
950+ — capacity of the Matangi Rau / Sir Owen Glenn Theatre (said to be the biggest in Bay of Plenty)

$33.7m — cost of the renovation

2014 — Rotorua Convention Centre renamed Sir Howard Morrison Performing Arts Centre

November 2017 — venue closed

February 2023 — public reopening



LESSONS FROM A CHURCH WALL

Fashion designer Karen Walker CNZM finds threads of family history in a Katikati mural.

There's a town in the Bay of Plenty called Katikati. You will have driven through it on the way to Waihi Beach or Tauranga. They grow avocados there, damn good ones. And kiwifruit. They have murals. Murals are their thing. That and avocados. The murals illustrate the town's story, many of them moments in its colonial past. They feature a lot of horses and women in long skirts. One of them stars my great-great-grandfather, William Gray. He looks handsome although it's not actually his face in the painting. The face is that of a contemporary Katikatian who paid a few hundred dollars to have his countenance painted on my great-great-grandfather's body. I assume all the faces on the mural are paid face-placements. I don't know about the golden retriever at Great-Great-Granddad's feet. Maybe my ancestor had a golden retriever or maybe the canine paid to be on the mural too. Either way, it's a handsome dog.

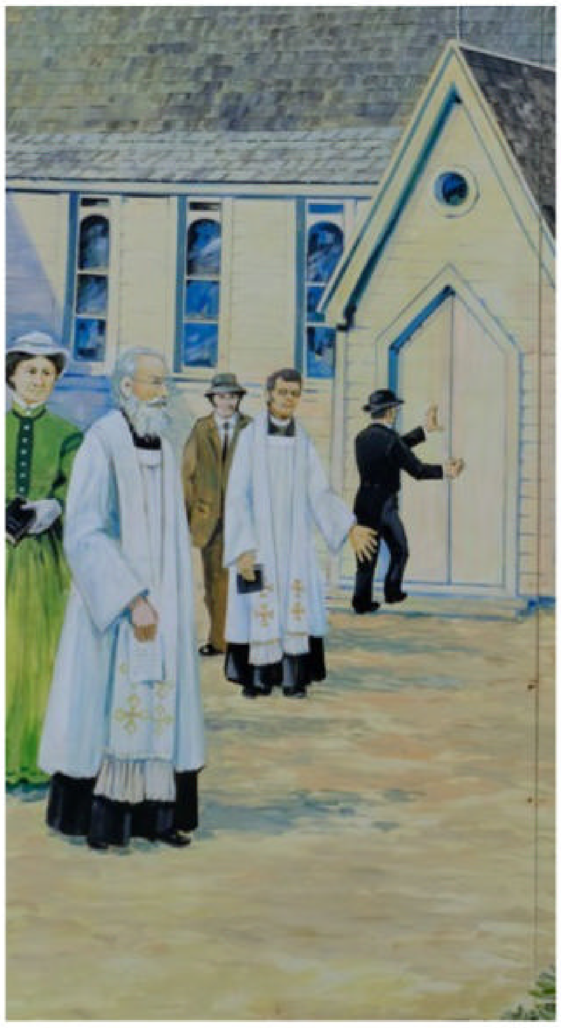
The mural GGG appears in is on St Peter's Anglican Church. GGG built the church. Or, more accurately, co-owned, with a Mr Simms, the contracting company that built the church. I'm not sure how hands-on the GGG was himself. Certainly, in the mural he's wearing a bowler hat and a suit while the unnamed man next to him is the one with the saw and nails, so perhaps William Gray didn't know one end of a hammer from another. Either way, it's his name that went down in history as the builder.

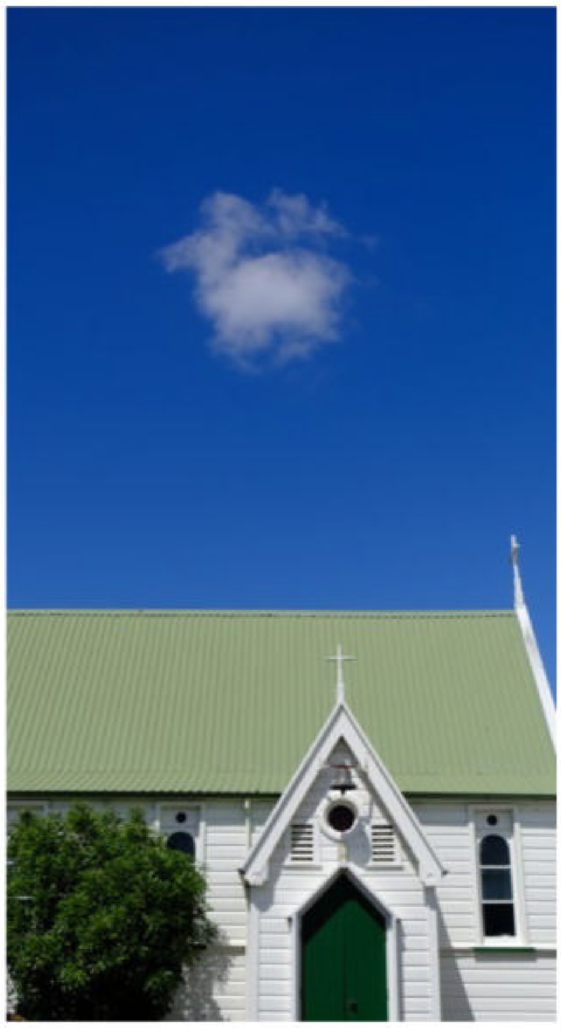
It's a pretty enough church. Simple and solid and stolid in that way that small-town colonial New Zealand required, with just enough flourishes to impress and keep them filing back in each Sunday. It's built of kauri. It's got a few wee stained-glass windows and I can see it would be a perfectly nice place to sit and contemplate for an hour or so once a week. I was certainly happy enough to sit there for a spell on my recent visit, to ponder, breathe, meditate, which is as close as a lifelong atheist gets to a religious experience, I suppose.

Just building a pretty church isn't enough to earn you a mural though. William built many of the buildings in the town but we don't see him memorialised up and down the main street. No, the reason he's two metres high outside St Peter's is due to his business sense. Some might call him hard-arsed. I call him awesome.

What transpired was that after completing the church in 1883, the church building committee didn't have the money for their final payment of £30. When the East Coast diocese bishop, Edward Stuart, arrived to consecrate the church it was found to be locked and William Gray found to be unwilling to hand over the keys. The consecration was performed from across the street.

This scene is what's captured in the mural. GGG's shown holding the keys behind his back with one hand and clutching the unpaid invoice with the other. He looks steadfast. Bishop Stuart looks cross.





Karen Walker and her dog Laika in front of the image of her great-great-grandfather. St Peter's Anglican church, above; below, mural detail.

I always thought this story was merely family folklore, and so it was with significant familial pride that, when visiting the church for the first time last year, I discovered it to be completely true and the church very pretty indeed. Most importantly though, I realised that GGG had impacted on the aesthetic and theistic landscape of his town in a real way, as well as setting a standard in terms of his business integrity.

I recently came across *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*'s Auckland edition from 1898. It had an entry about GGG that included this line: "As an energetic businessman it would be hard to find his equal." I love that William has reached out to me, across more than a century, with his gift of such a beautiful, simple and elegant thing that's benefited his community for a dozen decades as well as his message of not taking shit from anyone. What a gift to pass on to your great-great-granddaughter.

And, in case you're wondering, the bill was paid, and the keys handed over seven months later. ■

SAVE THE DATE

ZEALANDIA BY NIGHT TOUR

Wellington

On Now

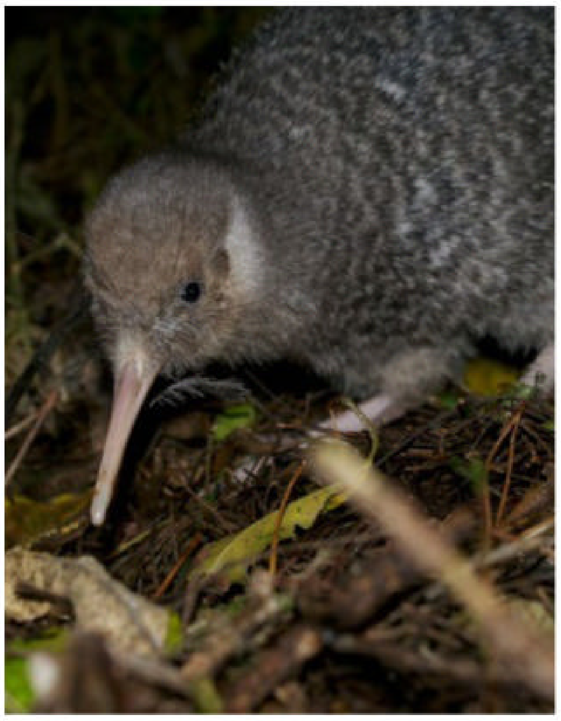
An 80 per cent chance of spotting a kiwi sounds pretty good to us. The two-and-a-half hour walk through the capital's ecosanctury is ideal for nature lovers seeking to meet endemic species such as wētā, glow worms and tuatara. Booking essential, for ages 12 and up. **visitzealandia.com**

WAITANGI DAY FESTIVAL

Waitangi Treaty Grounds

6 February

New Zealand's national day of commemorating the first signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi is not to be missed, and what better way to celebrate than attending the day-long festival on the Waitangi Treaty Grounds. Begin the day with the dawn service at 5am. **Waitangi.org.nz**



AUCKLAND LANTERN FESTIVAL

Manukau Sports Bowl

2–5 February

It's the Year of the Rabbit and the Auckland Lantern Festival is back after a three-year hiatus. This time it's in a new home in South Auckland, having outgrown its previous central-city locations. Bring the family along to enjoy the wrap-up of Lunar New Year festivities, with hundreds of handmade lanterns, cultural performances and food. Free. **aucklandnz.com**

ALL PHOTOS SUPPLIED

ED SHEERAN: + - = ÷ X TOUR (THE MATHEMATICS TOUR)

Eden Park, Auckland

10–11 February

Ed's returning to Aotearoa to perform his latest album "=", as well as treating fans to his best-known hits over two nights. The "Shape of You" singer promises cutting-edge production that audiences have never seen before. All ages welcome.
ticketmaster.co.nz

MARLBOROUGH WINE & FOOD FESTIVAL

Marlborough

11 February

Nestled in the heart of wine country, this festival will attract vino lovers from around the country. Live bands and the surrounding landscape provide easy entertainment to go with the refreshments.
marlboroughwinefestival.com

TARAWERA ULTRAMARATHON

Rotorua

11–12 February

Lace up your sneakers and get marathoning. Based in New Zealand's birthplace of tourism, this event has four races to choose from, ranging from 21 kilometres to 100 miles. Eight different lakes, waterfalls, and native forest are the highlights of this adventure. Registrations required.
taraweraultra.co.nz

NEW ZEALAND FRINGE FESTIVAL 2023

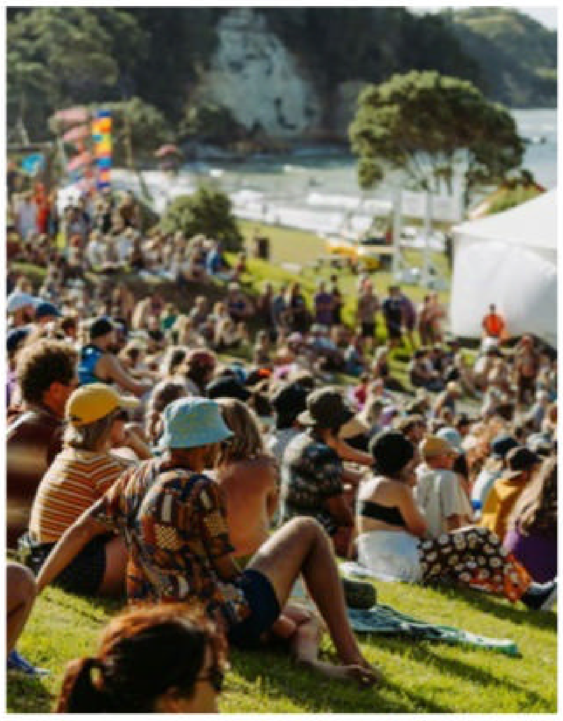
Wellington

17 February–11 March

With no constraints on the events included, this open-access festival is guaranteed to show you something you have never seen before. The creativity on show at what is the largest multidisciplinary arts festival in Aotearoa includes cabaret, circus, improv, puppetry, and spoken word.
fringe.co.nz

SHARE YOUR EVENTS HERE

Email us at:
info@northandsouth.co.nz
with details and a link to images.



SPLORE

Tāpapakanga Regional Park

24–26 February

A great big dress-up party held in the south-east reaches of Tāmaki Makaurau, Splore stands out from other music festivals due to its creative approach to partying. If the sculptures and abstract art displays don't pique your interest, performances from Kiwi icons like Brett McKenzie and Ladi6 might.
splore.net

HAMILTON ARTS FESTIVAL

Hamilton

24 February–5 March

Comedy, dance, music, and theatre intermix and mingle for two weeks at this outdoor festival showcase. Enjoy a collection of regional art and touring shows against the backdrop of the stunning botanical gardens.
hgaf.co.nz

KEEPING TIME

Sometimes life can feel like a constant battle against the clock, but these twists on timekeeping remind us that the ordinary can be an opportunity to play.

BY GABI LARDIES

STRATFORD

MECHANISED LOVERS

Four times a day, Romeo and Julliet (or at least their life-like wooden renditions) reaffirm their love on Stratford's main strip. The star-crossed lovers have been emerging from the windows of the Elizabethan-style clocktower since it opened in 1999, performing to recordings of lines from Shakespeare's famous balcony scene, backed by Elizabethan music.

INVERCARGILL

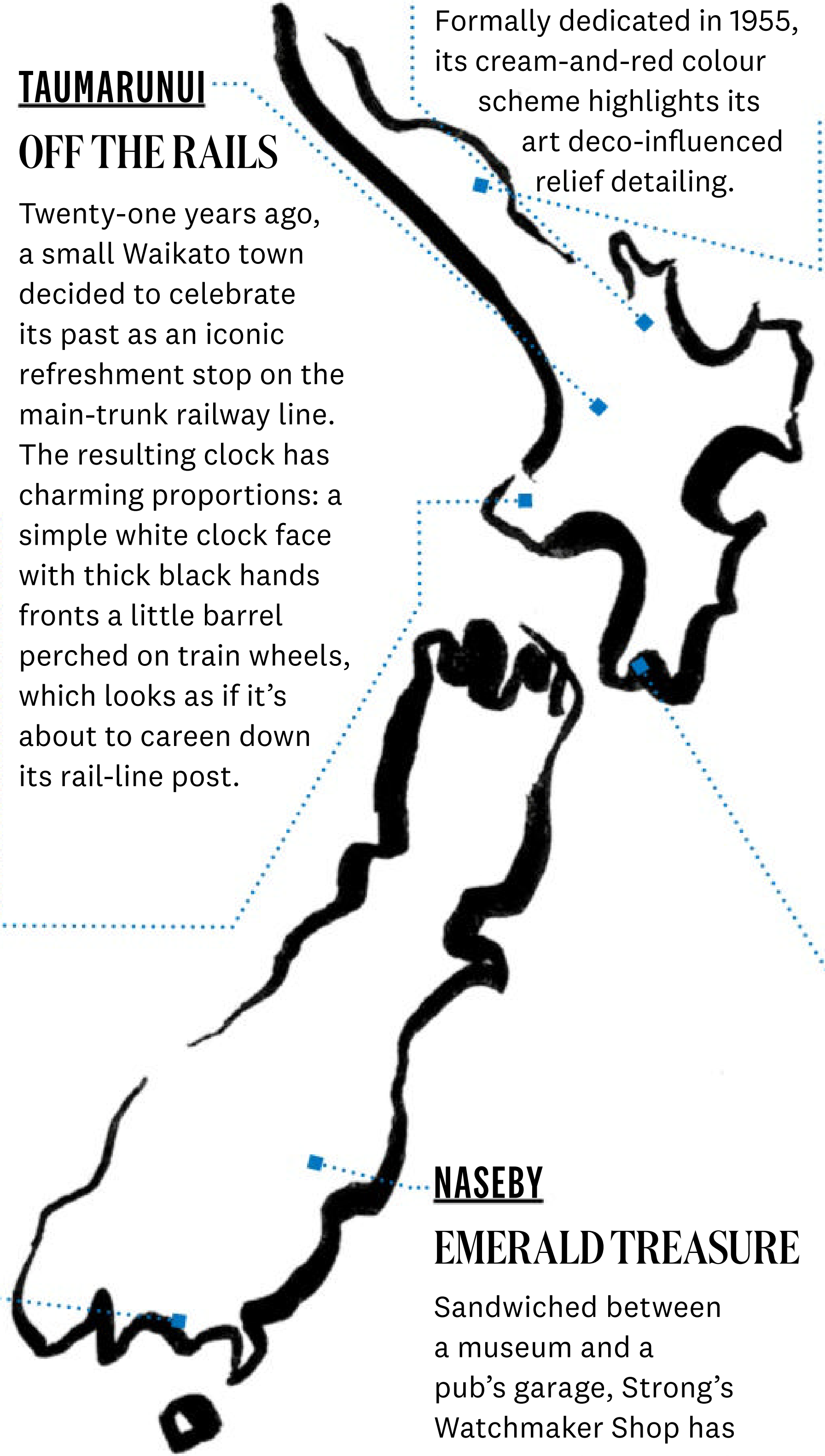
ALL-WEATHER SCULPTURE

While umbrellas are usually for warding off rain, this oversized steel umbrella in the Doon Street Reserve holds at its peak a sundial. Created by the late artist and long-time Southland Museum and Art Gallery director Russell Beck, *Our People – Time and Place* also maps the midwinter stars in its canopy. It was first installed on Don St during the summer solstice in 2000.

TAUMARUNUI

OFF THE RAILS

Twenty-one years ago, a small Waikato town decided to celebrate its past as an iconic refreshment stop on the main-trunk railway line. The resulting clock has charming proportions: a simple white clock face with thick black hands fronts a little barrel perched on train wheels, which looks as if it's about to careen down its rail-line post.



Invercargill

TE AROHA

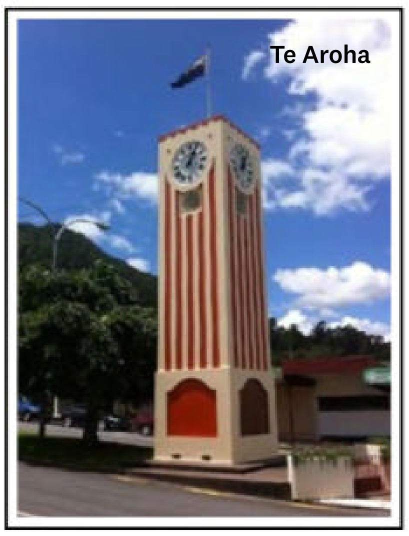
CHIMING RESPECTS

The boldly cuboid clock tower at the intersection of Te Aroha's Kenrick and Whitaker Sts is a memorial to 70 men from the town and district who lost their lives in World War II. Formally dedicated in 1955, its cream-and-red colour scheme highlights its art deco-influenced relief detailing.

NASEBY

EMERALD TREASURE

Sandwiched between a museum and a pub's garage, Strong's Watchmaker Shop has been standing since the peak of the Maniototo gold rush in the 1860s. Though it closed in 1967, the bright green façade still states its trade, and is crowned with a classic roman-numeral clock face.



WHANGĀREI

ARCHIE'S NOVELTIES

The 2100-strong collection at Claphams National Clock Museum had its beginnings in the collection of Archibald Clapham. His favourite timepieces surprised visitors, and incited laughter, perhaps with revolving eyes or a quickly climbing mouse. Outside, there's a room-sized rolling ball clock: a tangle of rails and racks on which balls indicate the time with their roving positions.

WELLINGTON

BODILY INVOLVEMENT

Outside the Carter Observatory in the Botanic Gardens, a series of granite and bronze markers stand in semi-circle. *The Sundial of Human Involvement*, by artist Charlie Stone, requires your shadow to be cast upon the markers and, if you stand just right, it is accurate to within a few minutes. Make sure to visit on one of Wellington's elusive "good days".

Gabi Lardies is *North & South*'s junior staff writer, a role supported by NZ On Air's Public Interest Journalism.

PHOTOS FROM LEFT: DENISBIN; BRETT TAYLOR; ITRAVELNZ; JAMIE MACKAY, 2012

PHOTO LINGTREN, SHUTTERSTOCK

HOME, AND AWAY

When Newshub journalist Paddy Gower involuntarily declared "Fuck, they do know her!" when crowds in London called out to New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, he may have been giving away more than he realised. She is an international star.

By Peter Bale

New Zealanders, especially the parliamentary press gallery, and even more so the Auckland-based commentariat, may be slightly exhausted — even bored — by Ardern, but overseas she's easily the most recognised and admired Kiwi leader the country has ever had.

Public recognition from the Queen's funeral crowd aside, her star remains bright with our allies and world leaders. She clearly gets on with Joe Biden; Anthony Albanese has replaced the hard-to-love Scomo; and on the 50th anniversary of Sino-Aotearoa relations, she came away from a recent meeting with Xi Jinping with an invitation to Beijing.

Maybe, just maybe, she can turn that to her domestic political advantage in an election year when she has a big in-tray of international issues to deal with. That might help distract from local issues of crime, the cost of living and whatever one-week wonder stories emerge. Surely her charisma and stature compared with her Opposition counterpart has to count for something, let alone her foreign affairs competence.

Even putting aside New Zealand exceptionalism (which is always followed by a scythe through the tall poppies), Ardern has genuine stature on the world stage. She spoke at the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, met Xi at APEC, spent time at the White House with Biden, has a reputation for candour and leadership from the 2019 mosque massacre and following "Christchurch Call" in partnership with French president Emmanuel Macron, and won plaudits for the coherence and empathy of her leadership during the first waves of the Covid pandemic.

She has stature and credibility that someone who was an Air New Zealand chief executive in his "past life" can only dream of for his next.

Looking to the coming year, here are some issues Ardern will face, any one of which might give her a lever up in terms of status and domestic political impetus.

China: She has been invited to Beijing in a period when Xi Jinping appears to be reconnecting with fellow leaders and the world outside China. She rightly wants to reduce New Zealand's reliance on China as a trading partner and has been

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern meets then-Prime Minister Theresa May at 10 Downing Street, 2018.

deft in raising tricky issues such as the Uighurs and Taiwan without aggravating Xi. She's called out China's "assertive" moves in the South Pacific and can be expected to do more.

I asked Otago University Director of International Studies Professor Robert Patman about this analysis.

"I think China does make a big distinction between New Zealand and other members of the Five Eyes," he said. "And from a Chinese perspective, the fact that New Zealand was one of the first Western countries to diplomatically recognise China, and then back China's admission to the WTO (World Trade Organisation) . . . these sorts of things make it matter to Chinese decision makers whose timeframe is often a bit longer than their Western counterparts."

Australia: Ardern has yet to resolve the 501 question, but it's clear she and Prime Minister Albanese have more chemistry than minister-of-everything Scott Morrison. Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong seems adept and about to improve relations with Beijing, while remaining firm in the commitment to the AUKUS defence relationship with the United Kingdom and the United States from which New Zealand is sensibly absent.

Again, Patman says: "Canberra will warm in their support for New Zealand with the exit of Scott Morrison. I think Australia looks much better than it has done for a long time. I think there's genuine affection between Jacinda Ardern and Anthony Albanese. They like each other and he goes out of his ways to praise her."

Climate: Ardern likes New Zealand to be seen as a climate leader both for solid trade reasons (knowing treaties will increasingly include carbon commitments), and also for the status it could give Wellington as a leader among smaller nations. Perhaps climate will also become an issue in the China relationship, especially if Beijing offers to help some of the South Pacific island nations at existential risk. Expect Ardern to try to move first.

"I think Anthony Albanese and Jacinda Ardern believe that their ability, along with the Americans in the Biden administration, to address this issue of trying to ameliorate the effects of climate change for the Pacific island states is the best defence against Chinese influence in the region," Patman says.

The United States: Washington has long got over any idea Wellington will abandon its anti-nuclear stance having spent years hoping that under constant and gentle pressure we'd buckle and embrace what it means to be in ANZUS. Nope, and the last National leader to say the nuclear ban would be "gone by lunchtime" — Don Brash — was eaten alive by Helen Clark.

Ukraine: After a hesitant start, especially on sanctions against Russia and oligarchs, Wellington has made significant diplomatic and military commitments to Kyiv. For a country our size the training, intelligence and logistics support is not insignificant. Expect it to continue. It's hard to imagine Ardern not visiting Zelensky.

Patman: "This is a big issue for New Zealand given our dependence on a rules-based international system, and she believes that New Zealand needs to position itself alongside those forces that are likely to prevail."

Of course, there are many potential banana skins internationally as well as domestically — especially in a country where a spate of ram raids feels like a crime pandemic. Oh, yes, the pandemic isn't over either and who knows whether she will have to deal with another wave, another variant, and perhaps have the chance to seize another leadership moment.

It is too easy to suggest that Ardern is on some sort of course to a plum United Nations post in the footsteps of Clark, though anyone who thinks that running the United Nations Development Programme is some sort of sinecure is dead wrong. Ardern is made of strong stuff but how long she can put up with the misogyny she faces at home must enter her mind.

Maybe the crowds in London who called out "We love you Jacinda" know something we might in the short term have forgotten: it is nice to be recognised and to have a leader who means something on the world stage, even if it takes Paddy by surprise. ■

PHOTO LINGTREN, SHUTTERSTOCK

Features

This month: the old and new politics of Samoa, the tough new world of medicinal cannabis production, laughs and good times shared over coffins, a dip into the esoteric world of the Esalen Institute and a photo essay celebrating where we feel at peace.

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PHOTO OLLIE NEAS

LOST IN THE WEEDS

After a century of prohibition, it’s now legal to buy cannabis medications from pharmacies. But most doctors won’t prescribe it, the black market is still flourishing and despite local companies raising more than $100 million to grow it, it’s almost entirely imported from overseas. What’s gone wrong with what was meant to be a booming sector?

BY GEORGE DRIVER

It was once one of the most controversial and dangerous buildings in the country. Now it's filled with cannabis.

When the Mataura paper mill opened in the 1870s it was the first of its kind in New Zealand, offering new promise for a fledgling settlement on the Southland plains. At its peak, more than 200 people worked at the factory, beside a waterfall on the Mataura River, about 10 kilometres south of Gore. But when international competition caused the price of paper to plummet in the late 1990s, the mill finally closed. The last Mataura-made paper left the factory in 2000 and the enormous buildings sat vacant.

Then a new business came to town. A Bahraini-owned company called Taha Asia Pacific saw potential in Mataura. In 2015, it reached a commercial agreement with the Tiwai Point aluminium smelter to store about 10,000 tonnes of the smelter's toxic waste in the old mill. It was meant to be temporary, but when Taha went into liquidation in 2016, the waste became Mataura's problem. Eventually it drove the inhabitants from their homes. When the waste — Ouvea premix, a by-product from aluminium dross — gets wet it releases toxic ammonia gas. In 2020, during a record flood, the Mataura River almost inundated the mill. The town was evacuated due to the threat of toxic gas and the country watched and wondered how such a potential environmental catastrophe was able to occur. The last of the dross was finally removed in 2021 after an agreement between government and the smelter and things looked to be returning to normal. Then another business arrived into Mataura.

When the government passed a law to legalise prescription cannabis, or "medical marijuana", in December 2018, a new industry was seeded. The Misuse of Drugs (Medicinal Cannabis) Amendment Act gave the government the power to set standards for medicinal cannabis products and rules for the new industry. It also removed cannabidiol (CBD) as a controlled drug, instead making it a prescription-only medicine (often available as an oil). Unlike tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the cannabinoid largely responsible for the plant's psychological effects — the "high" — CBD is considered non-psychoactive but is touted as a potential anti-anxiety and anti-inflammatory drug.

The law change also introduced a defence for palliative care patients using cannabis, effectively decriminalising the drug for the terminally ill (cannabis remains illegal for everyone else, unless they have a prescription).

In 2018, the first licences were granted for companies to cultivate medicinal cannabis for research purposes ahead of the new regime and dozens of companies gained licences around the country. By 2020, cannabis was finally able to be legally grown medicinally around the country and cannabis oils and even cannabis flowers (often colloquially known as "buds") became available at pharmacies on prescription. A new industry based on a plant that had been outlawed for almost 100 years began to emerge. Southern Medicinal, now based in Mataura's old mill is one of them.

In a sparsely furnished room in a prefab building that served as the mill's testing lab, Southern Medicinal co-owner Greg Marshall explains how the industrial building will become a major employer once more. Marshall says when the business reaches full production there will be about 300 people employed in the factory, processing 250 tonnes of cannabis a year grown on 500 hectares of farmland around the country, and under lights inside the mill's warehouses. A further 800 will be employed planting and harvesting the crop.

Marshall says that for Southern Medicinal, the main attraction in Mataura is power. The paper mill has its own hydro power station, and the biggest expense for an indoor cannabis operation is electricity. In 2019, Marshall started the company with the owner of the building and power station, Greg Paterson, brother of the late richlister Howard Paterson and one of the wealthiest landowners in the South Island, and Dunedin businessman Paul Chamberlain, who is CEO of the mental health charity, PACT Group. Marshall has a background in finance and cannabis. He was a founding director of North American cannabis company, Cannex, now trading as 4Front Ventures, all while based in Otago. He remains a shareholder of the company which operates in five states in the US, producing about 32 tonnes of cannabis a year. Marshall claims Southern Medicinal will be able to produce indoor-grown cannabis flower — where the highest concentrations of cannabinoids reside — at a cost of less than a dollar a gram, one-20th of the current street price. "We plan to be the first example of medicinal cannabis disrupting the black market on price," Marshall says.

He walks me outside, into the drizzle and brisk southerly of a southern spring, through a high-security gate in a barbed-wire fence and into a foyer of the old warehouse next door. Here we put on white overalls, booties and hairnets, then enter a low-ceilinged room which looks vaguely surgical — a white painted concrete floor, stainless steel implements on stainless steel tables and blinding lights. In five containers, dozens of cannabis plants stretch up towards LED lights, their nutrients carefully controlled via a hydroponic drip below. They are being grown to produce high concentrations of THC.

Through another door we enter the cold, cavernous warehouse of the paper mill, where about 40,000 cannabis plants carpet the floor, illuminated by bright lights in an otherwise gloomy room which was recently filled with toxic dross. These strains are low in THC but high in CBD. In a few weeks these plants will be travelling around the country, destined for 15 farms, including 10 in Southland, in what Marshall believes will be a major money-maker for farmers. In autumn, the plants will be harvested, processed back in Mataura and turned into a CBD concentrate both for export and for Kiwi patients.

But at the moment, that's purely theoretical. So far, the business has had one outdoor cannabis harvest, processing 10,000 plants and several tonnes of cannabis flower. But almost all of it has then been shredded and composted. Inside a container in the mill sit sacks containing hundreds of kilos of high-THC

PHOTO COURTESY RUA BIOSCIENCE

Left, Mataura's economic fate has depended on its two main industries bordering the Mataura River — the meat works (left) and the paper mill (right). Above, Greg Marshall's business involves partnering with dozens farmers to grow tens of thousands of cannabis plants on farmland around the country.

PHOTO, LEFT, COURTESY SOUTHERN MEDICAL, RIGHT GEORGE DRIVER

cannabis flower. If it was sold in a pharmacy today it would be worth millions of dollars, but at the moment Marshall's products have been unable to meet the government's minimum quality standards and this too is destined for the compost heap. It's currently the fate of almost all of the tonnes of cannabis grown by licensed companies around the country.

When the government took the first steps to legalise medicinal cannabis in 2017, there was talk of it becoming the country's next big export sector — that Kiwi-grown weed could be the next sauvignon blanc. Companies around the country raised over a hundred million dollars, often from mum-and-dad investors through crowd-funding platforms like PledgeMe, and the government has likewise poured millions of dollars into getting the sector established.

But in the two and a half years since the medicinal cannabis scheme came into force, no locally grown cannabis flower has been approved for sale in New Zealand so far, and only two CBD oils made from Kiwi-grown cannabis, produced by a single company, have received the Medsafe tick. The rest of the more than 20 products available are imported, or made locally from imported cannabinoids.

While the companies wait for regulatory change, or innovations that will allow them to pass the stringent tests, they are spending millions keeping the high-tech lights glowing to grow thousands of cannabis plants that may be destroyed. "We're bleeding out," Marshall says.

A ROYAL CURE

While cannabis is the latest class of medicine available for prescription in New Zealand, it is one of the oldest medications in the world, and was available over the counter here until the 1920s.

Humans have been using cannabis medicinally for at least 5000 years, but possibly much longer. Its first recorded use is in a Chinese pharmacopoeia from 2800BC. In the West, hemp — a leggy cultivar of cannabis sativa that has low levels of THC — was widely grown as a source of fibre, but the plant's medicinal use doesn't appear to have been widespread. That changed in the 1800s. Irish physician Sir William Brooke O'Shaughnessy worked in hospitals in India in the 1830s and noted that locals used cannabis oil to treat pain and spasticity. He brought the higher THC "Indian hemp" back to England in the 1840s, where it appears to have gained widespread acclaim. It is claimed Queen Victoria used cannabis tea to relieve menstrual cramps and the Queen's doctor, Sir John Russell Reynolds, later called the plant "one of the most valuable medicines we possess".

Cannabis concoctions soon found their way to the colonies. In New Zealand, ads began appearing in newspapers for Chlorodyne in the 1860s. It contained a potent mixture of chloroform, morphine, laudanum and cannabis and was marketed as a wonder drug to treat everything from coughs and colds to cancer and cholera. An ad published in the *New Zealander* in 1861 includes an endorsement from a surgeon who was using "20-drop doses with marvellous good effects in allaying inveterate sickness in advanced pregnancy".

Grimault and Co's "Indian Cigarettes" were also advertised here, "prepared with the Essence of Canabis Indica" [sic] and used for "asthma, and other complaints of the respiratory organs". In the 1880s, "Dr Douglas' Maori Cigarettes" containing cannabis, hemlock and datura, were also promoted as a cure for bronchial conditions. According to the national encyclopaedia, Te Ara, cannabis cigarettes were sold as a treatment for asthma and bronchitis until the 1930s.

Cannabis wasn't regulated in New Zealand until 1927, when it was scheduled in the Dangerous Drugs Act after an international convention called for its control. Cannabis could still be imported or manufactured under licence and was available by prescription. Medicinal cannabis use, however, was reportedly declining in any case as it was eclipsed by opiates and aspirin, which were more consistent and easier to dose.

In the 1960s, the world lurched further towards prohibiting the plant. The 1961 UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs made cannabis a schedule IV drug, reserved for the most dangerous drugs whose "liability is not offset by substantial therapeutic advantages". In New Zealand, this eventually led to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1975 which classified the cannabis plant as a Class C drug, with a moderate risk of harm, along with codeine, Valium and ketamine. If you possess or supply these drugs you face a maximum of three months imprisonment (although judges are advised not to impose prison sentences for possession and supply unless there are exceptional circumstances or previous convictions).

Like other controlled drugs, since 1975 cannabis was illegal to possess, manufacture or supply, but it was still able to be prescribed. But unlike Valium and morphine, which have been approved by Medsafe, prescription cannabis required ministerial approval. In practice this wasn't forthcoming. The first Medsafe-approved cannabis medicine, a THC mouth spray called Sativex, wasn't available in New Zealand until 2010 and was only approved for multiple sclerosis patients when other treatments failed. The medicine was not funded by Pharmac and reportedly cost around $1000 a bottle.

CBD was even more tightly controlled. A CBD medicine was first approved in 2015 in a one-off exemption involving a teen in a coma who was suffering seizures and later died. The then-health minister Peter Dunne made clear this exemption would not set a precedent.

The following year, medicinal cannabis went mainstream as it was revealed a trifecta of famous and respected Kiwis — broadcaster Paul Holmes, cricketer Martin Crowe and union leader Helen Kelly — had all used cannabis medicinally while battling terminal cancer. Kelly, suffering lung cancer, applied to the Ministry of Health via her oncologist to use a cannabis oil medication for pain and nausea. Her application was denied. In 2017, even a Grey Power branch lobbied for the government to legalise medicinal cannabis and in June that year, Dunne announced CBD products would be able to be prescribed without ministerial approval.

The watershed moment, however, occurred during the 2017 election campaign. A month after becoming Labour leader, Jacinda Ardern was asked during a leaders debate whether the party would legalise medicinal cannabis if elected. Ardern told debate host Mike Hosking, "I don't need 30 seconds, the answer is absolutely yes."

Seven weeks later, Labour took office in coalition with New Zealand First, and within 100 days the Misuse of Drugs (Medicinal Cannabis) Amendment Bill was tabled in Parliament. A year later, it passed (National opposed it, calling it decriminalisation by stealth). It gave the government a year to develop minimum standards for products and rules around prescriptions. A transition period, however, meant CBD products could be imported and sold without approval until September 2021 and products soon became widely available. Cannabis vaporisers were also legalised if they had been approved overseas as a medical device. A new industry began to emerge.

GREEN FIELDS OF HOPE

In Ruatoria, on the East Coast, the winds of change signalled hope. In 2018, the Hikurangi Cannabis Company became the first licensed cannabis company in the country.

Founded out of charitable trust, Hikurangi Enterprises, and run by locals Panapa Ehau and Manu Caddie, it quickly became the face of the medicinal cannabis industry.

Working with those who had grown cannabis illegally in the bush on the East Coast for decades, its founders said it aimed to offer well-paid jobs in a region where there were few opportunities beyond farming and forestry. They told the *New York Times* they wanted to generate 100 jobs within two years and ensure Māori were able to share in the economic gains of the nascent industry — particularly given they had disproportionately shouldered the burdens of prohibition.

Their vision gained widespread buy-in on the coast. In 2018, the company raised more than $1 million during a roadshow in Tairāwhiti and later launched a campaign on crowd-funding site PledgeMe which crashed the website due to the level of interest, raising a further $2 million in a single day. In an accompanying investment memorandum, the company forecast a net profit of $4.8 million in 2020, the first year the medicinal cannabis scheme would be operational, paying a $3.18 million dividend to shareholders.

The local tech institute, the Eastern Institute of Technology, got on board, starting a cannabis cultivation course which attracted hundreds of applicants. Prime-time TV got involved, covering the business's rise in a six-part documentary, *Growing Dope*, which aired on Prime in 2021. In 2019, the company changed its name to Rua Bioscience and the following year it became the second cannabis company to list on the New Zealand stock exchange — and the only NZX listed company in Tairāwhiti — with an implied market capitalisation of $70 million.

The hype wasn't limited to the East Coast. In South Auckland, a company called Helius started up and soon became the country's largest cannabis company, eventually attracting more than $50 million in private investment, including $15 million from richlister Guy Haddleton. Founded by advertising executive Paul Manning and local entrepreneurs Gavin Pook and JP Schmidt in 2018, Helius presented the clean-shaven, besuited and pharmaceutical side of the industry — a contrast to Rua's dreadlocked, flax-roots approach.

More companies sprouted along the length of the country and by 2021, 37 cultivation licences had been issued. Companies raised almost $10 million on crowd-funding sites, and tens of millions more from private funders and on the New Zealand stock exchange, many boasting rosy projections of multi-million dollar returns within a year or two. Significantly, most of the investments were made before the regulations governing the industry were revealed.

The government, meanwhile, has ploughed around $18 million into the industry. The largest grant occurred in April last year, when it gave $13 million to Marlborough cannabis company, Puro, to produce a handbook on growing organic cannabis and to develop unique cultivars — Puro also committed $19 million to the project. Agriculture minister Damien O'Connor said it was to support regional job growth in the Covid-19 recovery and that cannabis could become as successful as the wine industry.

When the rules for the scheme were finally released in April 2020 — just a week into the country's first Covid-19 lockdown — they included what have been called the toughest standards in the world. The regulations set a pharmaceutical standard for medicinal cannabis, requiring the rigour and consistency of a paracetamol tablet, but for a plant prone to natural variability. To manufacture medicinal cannabis — whether that's drying cannabis flower or manufacturing THC or CBD oil — companies must get a Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) certification, the gold standard for producing pharmaceuticals. This requires extraordinarily thorough procedures and expensive equipment. Some in the industry claim it's impossible to meet the standards without spending tens of millions. So far only four NZ cannabis companies have received GMP certification: Rua Bioscience, Helius, Katikati company Eqalis and Tauranga-based ZHM.

Panapa Ehau says the cannabis industry has failed to provide the economic boon that was hoped for, but has still created new jobs.

PHOTO COURTESY RUA BIOSCIENCE

Once GMP certified, each product must then undergo thorough testing before it's approved for prescription. Products must be shown to have consistent potency and shelf life and low microbial contamination to guard against mould. Many of the tests can't be performed in New Zealand and can take many months and cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. So far, the standards have proved insurmountable for most companies, who have found it almost impossible for a plant to achieve this pharmaceutical consistency. Only one locally grown product has been approved so far, a CBD oil produced by Helius from cannabis grown by Puro.

Rua Bioscience has an approved CBD oil, but this is manufactured using imported active ingredients, not from its locally grown cannabis. Ehau says using their own plants has proved too expensive and the process of getting approval is too challenging. "It takes anywhere up to 18 months to get one product verified, so our first priority has been about getting product out to New Zealanders and unfortunately the quickest way is by importing it," Ehau says.

The regulatory barriers have hit the company's share price. When Rua listed on the NZX in October 2020 — just a week after the recreational cannabis referendum failed — it reached 70 cents a share. It's mostly been downhill since — as of November it was trading at $0.245. The company is yet to turn a profit. In the 2022 financial year it reported an $8.6 million loss, up from a $6.19 million loss the previous year. In fact none of the medicinal cannabis companies growing in New Zealand have been profitable yet and many are haemorrhaging millions a year, with revenue so far elusive.

GreenFern Industries in Taranaki claims to have achieved what no one else has, by growing a cannabis flower that passes the test regime, but it likely won't be available to New Zealand patients — at least not for some time. The company doesn't have a GMP licence and so plans to export its flower to Europe to be processed in facilities that do, and sell the product there. Managing Director Dan Casey says it has to focus on making revenue first and can't afford to invest in getting GMP certification yet. "We've got investors breathing down our necks wanting results and at the moment the lowest hanging fruit is overseas markets."

The company has raised $8 million and listed on the NZX in October 2021, peaking that day at a share price of $0.43, but has since declined to $0.094. In 2020, it forecast it would make $7.9 million in revenue in the 2022 financial year and $28.8 million in 2023. But as of June 2022, it recorded a $2 million loss for the year. Its main source of revenue has been buying CBD oil in Australia and repackaging it for sale there under the GreenFern brand.

Because of the high costs of setting up, all of New Zealand's cannabis companies are dependent on exports — primarily to Australia and Germany. But despite many having lucrative supply agreements on paper, so far none have achieved this on a commercial scale. Even though the products won't be consumed in New Zealand, they still have to meet our standards to get an export licence. The products then also have to meet the destination country's standards, leading to costly double testing which can take many months. And most companies still can't surmount the first hurdle of local approval.

Rua has now changed tack. In January last year, it bought Zalm Therapeutics, a cannabis company chaired by former Air New Zealand CEO Rob Fyfe, for $10 million. Zalm has an agreement with Cann Group, one of Australia's largest cannabis companies which has a AUD$120 million growing and processing facility in Mildura, in Victoria, capable of producing 12,500 kilograms of cannabis a year. For the foreseeable future, Rua's cannabis will be grown in Australia for export to Germany, although the company says there may be some locally grown products available soon.

Ehau explains that the Ruatoria site will remain a breeding programme for now, supplying the genetics to be grown in Australia. He says Australia's regulations are less restrictive, while the industry has been established there for longer and is more developed. Medicinal cannabis was legalised there in 2016. Ehua says it might not be viable to export from New Zealand on a large commercial scale. "It's really expensive to grow in New Zealand," he says. "Our grower model was to enable people who have grown in the illicit market to come into the light and not have to look over their shoulders — the people who have carried the knowledge of the plant for decades in New Zealand and carried the negative implications of it being illegal. But the reality is it's really expensive compared to other places in the world."

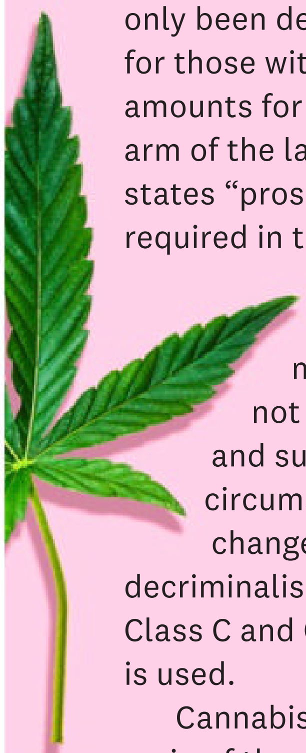
Ehau says Rua may be able to produce small quantities for niche markets from New Zealand, but mostly its products available here will be grown in Australia: not quite the vision the company started with. It employs about 20 people locally, down from a peak of about 30. But Ehau still says the venture has been worthwhile.

"The cannabis company was never meant to be a shiny knight riding a white horse and saving the day," he says. "It was only supposed to be one thing that contributed to increasing wellbeing and I know there have been wins. We're still able to develop intergenerational knowledge and capacity and we have a number of people employed in pharmaceutical jobs that haven't existed before."

In Mataura, Greg Marshall wants to export cannabis flower to GMP facilities in Australia and the US, but the products haven't passed the loss-on-drying test, designed to ensure the plant material is dried sufficiently so it won't encourage mould growth. He says the standard is impossible to meet and is calling for a different testing regime to be used, but Medsafe says this will require Cabinet approval which hasn't been forthcoming.

Southern Medicinal's ultimate goal is to produce a product called rosin, a cannabis extract created without solvents by using pressure and heat — what he says will be the Central Otago pinot noir of New Zealand cannabis. However, currently he is required to have a GMP certification to do this and he says the cost would make the operation unviable. Marshall says in Australia he would be able to produce the rosin and sell it without GMP, provided the final stage of production was carried out in a GMP facility. But in New Zealand GMP is required at each stage of production, which he says is prohibitively expensive. "All this does is add costs without improving patient safety," Marshall says. "It fundamentally impacts the viability of the industry."

A couple of companies have already failed. Last year, Rotorua cannabis company MedGreen Pharmaceutical,



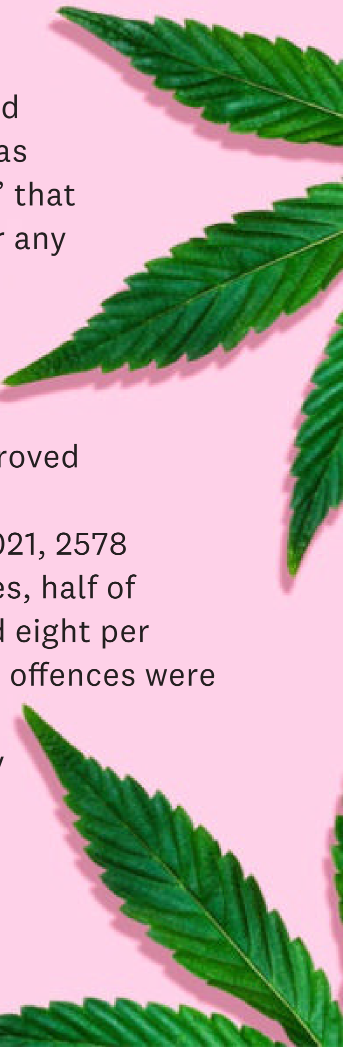
WHERE THERE'S SMOKE . . .

There's grey area in New Zealand's drug laws when it comes to cannabis. It is illegal to possess or grow cannabis: it has effectively only been decriminalised for the terminally ill and is legal for those with a prescription. But generally, small amounts for personal consumption may evade the long arm of the law. Since 2019, the Misuse of Drugs Act 1975 states "prosecution should not be brought unless it is required in the public interest . . . [and] consideration should be given to whether a health-centred or therapeutic approach would be more beneficial". The act also advises judges not to impose prison sentences for possession and supply unless there are exceptional circumstances or previous convictions. These changes have sometimes been interpreted as decriminalisation, however cannabis remains both a Class C and Class B drug, depending on how the plant is used.

Cannabis preparations including hashish (the resin of the plant, rich in THC) and cannabis oils, and technically covering cannabis cookies and other edible forms of cannabis, are classified as Class B, with a "high risk". Other Class B drugs include MDMA (ecstasy), amphetamine (speed), morphine and fentanyl (a drug associated with more than 50,000 overdose deaths in the US in 2020 alone). Making or supplying these drugs attracts a maximum 14 years imprisonment and three months for possession. However, cannabis is a Class C drug when it's in basic plant form (cannabis flower or "buds"), the same classification as codeine, Valium and ketamine. Possessing these drugs attracts a three month maximum prison sentence and eight years for dealing. Cultivating cannabis is a separate offence with a maximum seven-year sentence.

It's also illegal to possess drug utensils for consuming cannabis, including a bong, pipe or "roach clip" used for holding a joint — the latter is defined as a device with "a pincer or tweezer action" that "depicts cannabis fruit, cannabis seed, or any part of the cannabis plant". Possession of one of these tweezers carries a maximum sentence of one year in prison. Cannabis vaporisers are now legal, though, provided they've been approved overseas as a medical device.

Cannabis prosecutions continue. In 2021, 2578 people were charged for cannabis offences, half of which were for possession or utensils and eight per cent of those charged with cannabis-only offences were sentenced to prison. Only 13 per cent of those convicted were for possession-only offences, and prosecutions are declining.



one of the country's first, went out of business after it reportedly ran into cash flow problems. The owners attempted to sell the business as a going concern, but there were no takers and it was later sold out of administration . Another, Medicann based in Tauranga, went under in 2020 after shareholders voted to liquidate the company when one of its founders allegedly misled investors.

Ali Seyfoddin, an associate professor in pharmacy at the Auckland University of Technology, started a postgraduate course on the science of cannabis in 2020, attracting 100 students in its first semester. He says the high cost of producing pharmaceutical-grade cannabis means most companies might not be viable long-term.

"You've created an exclusive market where only big players with millions of dollars of investment can survive," Seyfoddin says. "I really don't see this industry going forward if they keep the current legislation. In two years' time there might be two companies left, the rest will be bankrupt."

LICENSED TO SELL

The only cannabis companies that appear to be making money are the importers. Mark Dye founded NUBU Pharmaceuticals after a life-changing four hours at his day job, hosting afternoons at radio station, Newstalk ZB. It was shortly after the death of Paul Holmes and Martin Crowe when the topic turned to medicinal cannabis and something remarkable happened. "We had four hours of positive talkback," Dye recalls. The station's largely conservative listenership was unanimously calling for legalising weed. "I thought, if the older generation are calling out for this then the politicians are behind."

He began working on a business plan while hosting reality TV show, *Heartbreak Island*. Initially, Dye planned to start a cannabis growing company like the others, but after looking at businesses overseas he changed tack and focused on importing cannabis. "We realised there were thousands of people building these facilities globally and New Zealand was too late to the party."

It took 15 months to get the first product approved, a cannabis flower grown by Australian Natural Therapeutics Group (ANTG) in a small town in New South Wales. Last year it became the first cannabis flower to be legally sold in New Zealand in a century. The cannabis flower from Australia has been able to meet New Zealand's regulations by irradiating the product to kill microbes – the microbial limit test is one of the main barriers to getting products approved here. But the irradiating equipment costs millions of dollars. New Zealand growers have said they're reluctant to irradiate their product and are exploring alternatives.

Having jumped the hurdles, Dye is supportive of the stringent regulations. "As frustrating as the process was and the amount of sleepless nights it caused, I understand it. This is a medicine that is going to be ingested by people and needs to be safe."

Six years ago, Mark Dye had a small business importing "fish hooks and lip balm". Now he imports kilos of cannabis.

PHOTO COURTESY MARK DYE

Medleaf Therapeutics also started importing cannabis flower from Canada and Australia and has two products approved. The company was founded by Courtney Letica, who began illegally growing cannabis in his garage in 2016 to help his uncle who had terminal cancer and had been denied legal access. "I made him an oil and it helped him sincerely," Letica says.

The company's sole employee, Shane Le Brun, has been a patient advocate for medicinal cannabis for more than a decade. He also grew the plant illegally to help his wife who suffered from chronic pain from a spinal injury. Le Brun went on to become coordinator of Medical Cannabis Awareness, a charity helping patients navigate legal access.

Le Brun and Letica say other countries are able to grow cannabis at a far cheaper price, making the medicine more affordable for New Zealand patients. The company is currently seeking approval to import from a Columbian grower.

"New Zealand patients aren't wealthy," Le Brun says. "They are often on a sickness benefit, so there's no room to have a premium price for a premium product. It's a medicine. Would people pay more for a packet of paracetamol because it's made in New Zealand?"

Overseas companies are also playing a greater role in the New Zealand market. Australian cannabis company MedReleaf now has three cannabis flower products approved while American pharmaceutical company Tilray has five approved products.

Ali Seyfoddin agrees that there's little opportunity for New Zealand exports. "There's nothing unique about New Zealand cannabis," he says. "It's mostly from imported seeds grown in controlled environments, so there is no export market. As soon as America federally legalises cannabis they will be exporting it. Colombia and Mexico are exporting and Thailand is coming up too. We've missed the train."

Unlike sauvignon blanc, it is difficult to market pharmaceutical products based on New Zealand's brand. Because cannabis is an unapproved medicine, it is illegal for companies to advertise and in practice that has prevented them from providing any information about their products here. They can only provide information once a doctor or pharmacist requests it directly. Companies also can't export to recreational markets as a UN convention bans this. But the cannabis companies say they do have a competitive advantage and a future.

Carmen Doran took over as CEO of Helius in 2021 after working for 10 years in senior positions at the global pharmaceutical giant, Novartis. She says New Zealand is viewed as a country with trusted institutions and regulations, which is important when selling medicine, particularly in a global industry where many companies aren't used to pharmaceutical regulations. "We can't compete on price, but we can on innovation and quality." She says the future will be around developing cannabis strains and products designed to target specific medical conditions by using precision growing techniques and innovative delivery systems.

Despite the stringent regulations, most companies *North & South* spoke to were supportive of the pharmaceutical standard. "It's medicine, it's got to be something that's not going to make people sicker," Doran says. Germany already requires GMP-grade cannabis, while Australia is moving to GMP regulations, so relaxing restrictions might make exports unattainable, and New Zealand companies can't survive on domestic sales alone. But many in the industry claim New Zealand follows a stricter interpretation of the rules than anyone else. They all want tweaks, particularly around enabling local testing and relaxing rules to allow for exports to be allowed without meeting local standards. "Some restrictions can be changed without impacting patient safety," Doran says.

The industry would also like to see low-dose CBD products available over-the-counter, as is the case in the United Kingdom and parts of Europe, and for government subsidies for medicinal cannabis products to make them cheaper for patients. Greg Marshall, however, is threatening to take the government to court if the regulations aren't amended to harmonise with Australia's rules.

Medsafe declined an interview request but is consulting on changes to the scheme, with submissions due by the end of January. Changes could include allowing cannabis to be exported without meeting New Zealand's minimum standards and no longer requiring cannabis used in manufacturing oils to be processed in a GMP facility.

MEDICAL BARRIERS

While the cannabis industry is struggling with new regulations, many in the medical establishment are calling for tougher standards.

Product standards are strict, but New Zealand's cannabis prescription rules are among the most liberal in the world. When the medicinal cannabis amendment was passed, politicians were eager to frame it as being about helping the terminally ill and those with chronic pain. But when the details of the scheme were released they allowed any doctor to prescribe cannabis for any condition.

General practitioners, however, have been hesitant to prescribe the drug because cannabis is unlike any other prescription medicine in the country. Beyond the fact that it's a plant and many people chose to smoke this medicine, cannabis also hasn't been approved by Medsafe because there's not yet enough evidence from clinical trials that it actually works. There is also limited clinical information on the impact of different doses, delivery methods and drug interactions.

University of Otago pharmacology professor Michelle Glass has been studying cannabinoids for 25 years. She says the lack of research is partly due to the years of prohibition. Of the trials that have been completed, she says many are poor quality, with small sample sizes and weak design. Many variables are involved: different doses, the range of cannabinoids (more than 100 have been identified), and different forms and delivery methods. "It makes it very hard to get a clear picture on whether it's effective."

The Best Practice Advocacy Centre New Zealand (BPAC), a not-for-profit that gives advice to health professionals, has put out a guide on medicinal cannabis. It says: "There is currently insufficient clinical trial evidence to support medicinal cannabis products being used first-line for any indication." But it says there may be a case for prescribing for some conditions when conventional treatments have failed.

Because of the lack of trials showing efficacy, cannabis products are still officially "unapproved" by Medsafe but are available under an exemption created for political reasons due to the high level of public support for legal access — some surveys have found 81 per cent in favour.

It's a position the medical establishment has opposed. Both the now defunct New Zealand Medical Association and the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners (RNZCGP) called for cannabis products to only be approved if they met the same Medsafe standards as any other medicine. RNZCGP medical director Dr Bryan Betty says because the drug doesn't have Medsafe approval, many GPs are concerned they may be liable for any adverse reactions. The Medical Council's Good Prescribing Practice code states prescribers must be familiar with adverse effects, drug interaction, doses and effectiveness of the medicines they prescribe. But for medicinal cannabis, this information is lacking. "If issues were to emerge down the track then there could be legal implications with that," Betty says. "There's no doubt that potentially there could be benefit shown for certain medical conditions. But there is a need for good quality trial evidence and good monitoring of potential problems arising." At a minimum, the college would like to see information recorded on cannabis prescriptions and the demographic of those accessing the drug.

The lack of trial evidence also places the onus on GPs to educate themselves on the risks and benefits of cannabis and Betty says for many — during a pandemic

PHOTO STUFF

with unprecedented pressure on the sector — it's been put in the too-hard basket. The RNZCGP is developing a position statement on medicinal cannabis, but Betty says it's challenging as there is a wide range of opinion among the college's 5500 members.

Massey University drug-policy researcher Marta Rychert has led a project evaluating the medicinal cannabis scheme, and has conducted surveys which found patients were being turned down for cannabis prescriptions two-thirds of the time. The biggest reason for doctors denying a prescription was the lack of evidence, but also concerns about their professional reputation and the financial impact on patients. While opiates may be subsidised and cost only a few dollars for a prescription, medicinal cannabis typically costs over $200 depending on the product.

But that hasn't stopped people accessing cannabis medicinally, albeit in a form that's completely unregulated. Analysis by the Drug Foundation found an estimated 266,700 New Zealanders used cannabis medicinally, but only six per cent had accessed it under the medicinal cannabis scheme in 2020. While prescription numbers have increased since then, the overwhelming majority appear to still use the black market.

As of September, 76,897 medicinal cannabis products have been supplied under the scheme since January 2021. Of those, 70 per cent were CBD-only products and eight per cent were THC-only, with the remainder being "mixed". The figures have been variable but slowly increasing, from 2053 in January 2021 to 3632 in September 2021, and a high of 6415 products distributed in August 2022.

Because of the hesitance from some GPs, a number of specialty cannabis clinics have sprung up around the country. People can even get a consultation online and have their prescription delivered to them.

Dr Mark Hotu started Green Doctors in Ponsonby in 2019 after working as a GP in Auckland and discovering a lot of his patients were using cannabis to treat chronic pain. He began researching the drug and decided to open the clinic, which has grown to have five doctors seeing about 120 patients a week. "The last few months has been the biggest growth in three years," Hotu says. "There's been a real explosion."

Anecdotally, people have also been using cannabis clinics to access cannabis recreationally. Hotu says it is no different to people lying to get other prescription medications. Prescribing cannabis at least gives a level of oversight. "We're here to help people with their symptoms, not get people high," Hotu says. "I guess if someone wanted to pull the wool over your eyes they could, but they could do the same thing with sleeping tablets or morphine."

Other advocates in the profession have said the relatively low risk from cannabis and the potential benefits warrant an experimental approach to prescribing. There has never been a reported fatal overdose from cannabis, making it technically less toxic than paracetamol (although not necessarily less harmful). By contrast, between 2017 and 2021, prescription medicines were involved in 321 overdose deaths, including 97 involving diazepam (Valium) and 72 involving the sleeping pill, zopiclone. In 2021 alone there were 75 opioid overdose deaths and 25 from benzodiazepines.

Green Doctors owner Dr Mark Hotu says cannabis isn't a silver bullet, but many people experience significant benefits, especially when conventional treatments fail.

PHOTO COURTESY MARK HOTU

Hotu says there needs to be more information to educate GPs and he disagrees with the BPAC guidelines. "I don't think any of them [BPAC] have worked as a physician in a medicinal cannabis clinic. They're just a bunch of scientists that have read a bunch of articles with no consideration of anecdotal evidence."

However, Michelle Glass says anecdotal evidence is not science, given that about a quarter of patients in clinical trials report an effect from placebos. "I think we owe it to patients to do proper clinical trials with standardised products and establish whether there is a benefit or not."

Glass has also been concerned about the proliferation of cannabis clinics, particularly due to the fact that a cannabis company has now opened one. The Pain Clinic, which opened in Nelson in July, is a subsidiary of Medical Kiwi, a Nelson-based cannabis company. Its website says it was established "to meet the growing need for CBD oil and medicinal marijuana in New Zealand". Other cannabis companies are also opening clinics. "If we had opioid manufacturers setting up doctors to prescribe opiates sponsored by opioid companies we'd be outraged," Glass says.

A PATIENT WAITING GAME

Five years ago, Pearl Schomburg made a suicide pact. Suffering pain from arthritis and a range of other health conditions, she had been on a concoction of opioids and antidepressants for years when she decided she would either have a life without pharmaceuticals or no life at all. She threw her medications out and started using cannabis butter to treat her arthritis and pain.

"Within 24 hours I felt the fog in my brain lifting and knew I'd made the right decision."

She has been using cannabis medicinally ever since, sourced from a trusted "green fairy" who goes by "Gandalf". The well-spoken great-grandmother became a vocal advocate for legalising medicinal cannabis, leading the Auckland Patients Group which marched down Queen Street calling for legalisation in 2017, and has become a facilitator, connecting green fairies with patients in the city.

"My quality of life now is so much improved," she says. "It's not that I don't have pain and discomfort but I can manage it and I know which way I'll continue for the rest of my life. I have quite a distrust of pharmaceuticals because of my journey."

Last year, however, she went back to the pharmacy. In February, she became the first person in New Zealand to be legally prescribed cannabis flower. But since then she's reverted to the black market, or what she calls the "local cannabis market". She says the imported legal cannabis flower is lower quality and more expensive than what Gandalf supplies.

Cannabis companies are unable to advertise the prices of their products, but information collated by patients online shows the price of cannabis flower ranging from $450 for 35 grams ($12.85 a gram) up to $415 for 10 grams ($41.50 a gram) for a high THC flower. By contrast, Schomburg says the price for an ounce of cannabis in Auckland is $350 to $400 ($12.36 to $14.13 a gram), while a gram of cannabis, sold as a "tinny", is typically $20. Legal CBD oil ranges from $80 up to $490 depending on the strength and volume and is usually less than $4 for a 50 milligram dose, while THC oil costs around $200 a bottle equating to about $2 for a 5 milligram dose. Because it is difficult for patients to shop around due to the ban on advertising, there is also a huge difference in prices between different pharmacies, with some charging $150 more for the same product.

There are other costs accessing legal cannabis, too. Because most GPs won't prescribe it, many patients choose to go to cannabis clinics where consultations aren't subsidised and can cost between $49 and $290. "These can be insurmountable hurdles for people on low incomes and most prefer to grow their own and make what they need," Schomburg says.

The lack of information available on the legal products makes it difficult for patients to choose different cannabis strains, which Schomburg says can have vastly different effects.

There are, of course, quality issues in the "local market" as well. In 2021, Crown research institute Environmental Science and Research (ESR) tested 100 cannabis products from green fairies and the results were hugely variable. One CBD oil contained more THC than CBD, making it potentially dangerous for some users, and in general products touted as being high in CBD often were not. It found few of the CBD oils and tinctures would provide an effective dose as they had such low levels of CBD.

Schomburg, however, says a legal and regulated "local market" would solve these problems. She wants food-grade medicinal cannabis to be approved, which would allow green fairies to be registered and provide tested products, without requiring millions of dollars to meet pharmaceutical standards. She also wants medicinal cannabis decriminalised, allowing patients to grow their own but with a legal testing scheme. "We believe we are the biggest stakeholders in this area but the narrative has been taken over by these corporates and we're not being listened to."

Back in Mataura, the cannabis seedlings grown in the mill have now been planted in farms around the country. But Greg Marshall's not sure whether it will be the last harvest processed in the town, or if the cannabis is destined for pharmacies or the compost heap. He says the company can survive until the second half of the year, when he hopes new regulations will be introduced. "It will be a close run," he says.

Up the road in Milton, Mike Breeze owns the small cannabis company, Pure Isolation, run out of a converted farm shed. He's more upbeat. He says for an industry that was outlawed for a century and is operating under regulations that were developed within a year, things are going alright. Breeze got into growing cannabis after growing peonies commercially on his lifestyle block and says the two industries aren't so different.

Pearl Schomburg says many cannabis patients have become disillusioned with the legal scheme and prefer to use the black market.

"It's the same as the peony game here," Breeze says. "We can't compete on the world stage, but we can together. We collaborate and can fulfil a 30,000 flower order into Holland in a way we can't do individually and we're seeing that spirit in medicinal cannabis already and it's incredibly encouraging.

"I've never been poorer or worked harder. We're all struggling as a nascent industry during a pandemic, but there's an amazing collaborative spirit that feels uniquely New Zealand. Some interesting approaches and partnerships are emerging and that's how we'll win." ■

George Driver is *North & South*'s South Island correspondent. This role is made possible by support from NZ On Air's Public Interest Journalism.

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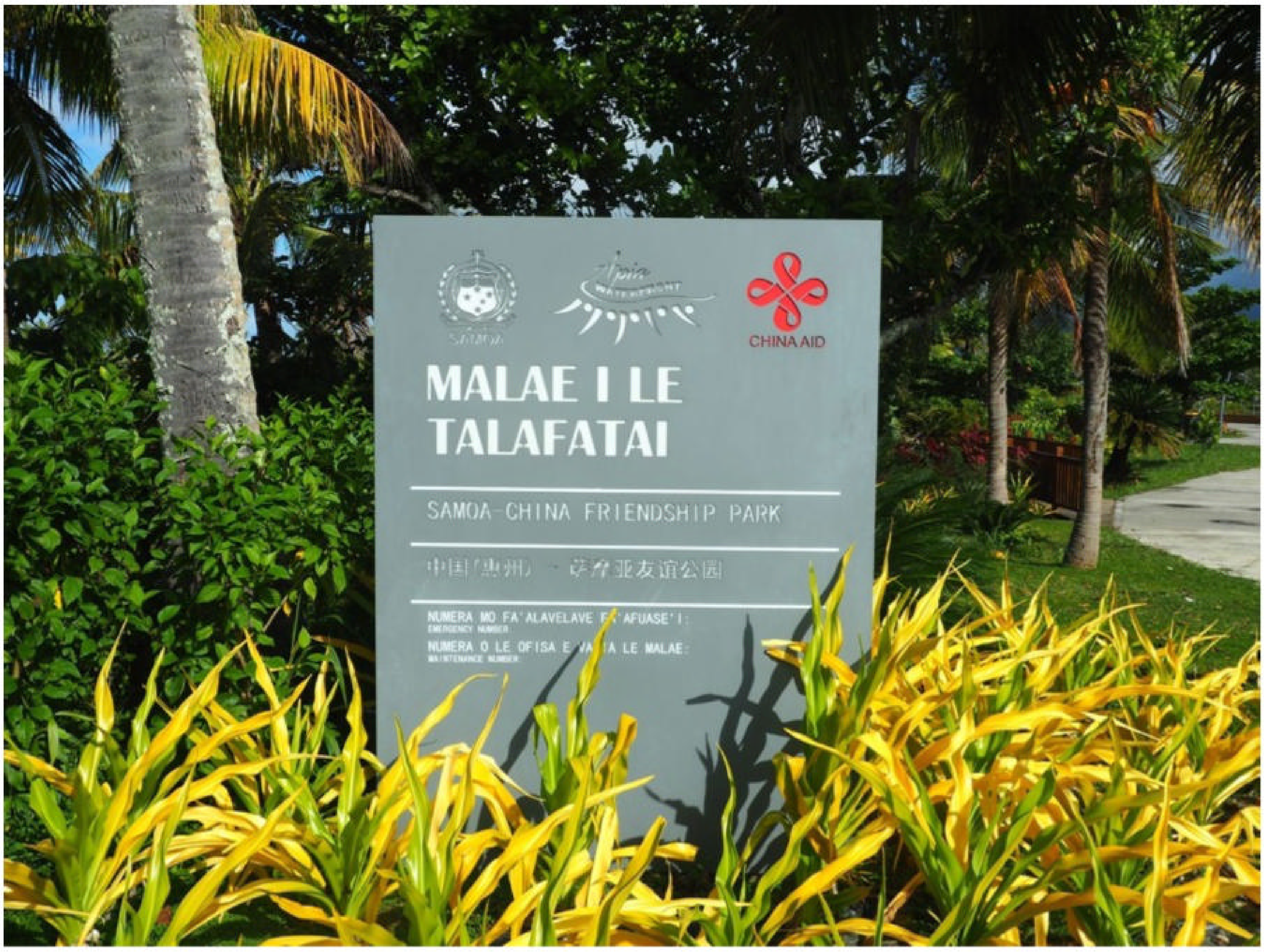
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The escalation of both Chinese investment and a potential military presence in the South Pacific has China watchers concerned. In Samoa, there are mixed feelings about both Sino influence and the island nation's growing indebtedness to the superpower.

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY OLLIE NEAS

In December 1894, mourners carried the body of Robert Louis Stevenson up the steep, jungled slopes of Mount Vaea to his final resting place, overlooking Apia.

During his life, the Scottish novelist had become an international celebrity for his tales of romantic adventure, such as *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*. But after settling in Samoa in 1889, Stevenson experienced a political awakening.

Samoa was entangled in colonial rivalry, as the United Kingdom, United States and Germany wrestled to seize control of the strategically important archipelago in the South Pacific. Gunboats were a common sight off the coast of Apia, sometimes firing at villages on shore. In 1889, open war was only avoided when a cyclone wrecked the US and German warships anchored in harbour.

As Stevenson learnt the Samoan language, exchanging legends with local chiefs, he began to see parallels between the position of the Samoans and his fellow Scots. Both were dominated by foreign powers, their rich cultures suppressed. No longer content to tell tales of exotic adventure, Stevenson became an activist and agitator, penning letters to European papers about Samoa's plight.

But it was of little use. Five years after Stevenson's death, at a meeting half a world away in Washington, the imperial powers agreed to divide Samoa between them.

The US took Tutuila and others islands in the east, while Germany took the larger islands of Upolu and Savai‘i in the West. In exchange, Germany recognised Britain’s interests in Tonga and parts of Africa. The Samoan people were not consulted.

More than 120 years on, the grave of Robert Louis Stevenson offers a glimpse of a new great power contest gripping the Pacific.

From the top of Mount Vaea, the US diplomatic compound can be seen through the trees below, surrounded by a security fence. Directly across the road, with a view over the fence, is a large construction site for a new embassy complex for Samoa’s largest creditor: the People’s Republic of China. On the other side of the construction site sits the Australian defence compound, which until recently looked out over the ocean. Now, a multi-storey complex, adorned with a banner in Chinese characters declaring “always stay with the Party”, blocks the view.

Since World War II, the US and its allies have enjoyed a strong influence in the Pacific. But that order is under threat as China’s power and influence in the region grows, provoking anxiety in the halls of power in Washington, Canberra and Wellington.

Chinese-built infrastructure — from roads to bridges, parliament buildings to stadiums — is now ubiquitous across the Pacific, the product of investment that has seen China become the second largest aid donor to the region behind Australia, winning favour from Honiara to Nuku’alofa. Since 2000, the value of Chinese exports to the region has increased 12-fold. Three Pacific countries — Tonga, Samoa and Vanuatu — are among the most heavily indebted to China of countries anywhere in the world.

Diplomatic engagement is intensifying. Since 2014, there has been an unprecedented 32 face-to-face meetings between Pacific leaders and Chinese President Xi Jinping. All but four Pacific states have severed relations with Taiwan in favour of Beijing. China is also pitching itself as a security provider to Pacific states, as Chinese naval vessels become an increasingly common sight in Pacific waters.

As China’s presence has grown, so too has concern in Western capitals, where China’s rise is often described in sinister terms — threatening peace and stability, entrenching corruption, entrapping small island nations in debt.

That concern reached fever pitch last March, when news broke of a security agreement between the Solomon Islands and China, which appeared to allow for the deployment of Chinese security forces to the islands at the request of the Solomons government. Although defended by Solomons officials as a response to domestic social unrest, Western observers were quick to see the agreement as opening the door to a broader Chinese military presence in the South Pacific — and potentially to a Chinese naval base near Australia’s border.

Australian commentator David Llewellyn-Smith, the former owner of foreign affairs journal *The Diplomat,* called for Canberra to prepare to “invade” the Solomons and “topple its government”, while former prime minister and China expert Kevin Rudd called the development Australia’s worst security policy failure since World War II. In New Zealand, former foreign affairs minister Winston Peters lumped Jacinda Ardern’s government with the blame, while Ardern herself called the development “gravely concerning”. What has followed has been a year of diplomatic jousting unprecedented in the region in recent times.

But in Apia — as in other Pacific capitals — the response to these developments has not been so simple. Over 120 years after that meeting in Washington, Samoa remains a divided country. While what was Western Samoa won its independence 60 years ago, the islands to the east remain a territory of the US, a nation whose military bases still dot the Pacific. In these waters, history remains close to the surface, guiding the way between treacherous currents.

At party headquarters, the ousted prime minister holds court in his office, the curtains drawn, a minute’s drive from a parliament that he is barred from entering.

For 22 years, Tuila‘epa Sa‘ilele Malielegaoi served as Samoa’s prime minister — the longest tenure in Samoa’s history. But after a nail-biting election, an ensuing constitutional crisis, and a series of contested court rulings, Tuila‘epa now finds himself out of power and suspended from Parliament for contempt of court. Over a year on from the election, he remains defiant. “Oh we are fighting. This government has proceeded from one unconstitutional, illegal decision to another and another and another.”

While Tuila‘epa remains an influential figure, railing against his opponents through a weekly talk show on the nation’s main TV channel, there is little denying the wave of discontent that brought about the end of his government and the most dramatic shift in Samoan politics in 40 years. That discontent was of course multifaceted — but one factor was controversy over a

A tangible symbol of China’s growing interest in Samoa and the Pacific — its new embassy complex as seen from Mount Vaea. It dwarfs the nearby US and Australian compounds.

Former Prime Minister Tuilaʻepa in his office at the Human Rights Protection Party in Apia. He championed the deepening of ties between Samoa and China, which he says caused pushback from Western donors.

proposed port development at Vaiusu Bay near Apia, to be paid for with a $139 million loan from China. To Tuilaʻepa, the proposal was a prudent step to boost port capacity. But to the then Opposition, it was a step too far, raising questions about Samoa's deepening ties to China under a prime minister who had come to be regarded by some as a close China ally.

> **"We still owe China $400 million in debts from the past. We do not have enough coconuts to repay the Chinese back for all these loans."**

The fruits of those ties are everywhere in Samoa. The international airport terminal, a multi-facility sports complex, government buildings, the hospital, schools, a cultural centre — all built by China. The price: a steady rise in debt, which has seen China become Samoa's single largest creditor, accounting for around 40 per cent of its external debt. As at 2019, Samoa ranked sixth globally among countries most indebted to China. The proposed port development at Vaiusu Bay would have increased debt exposure to China by 70 per cent per cent on one estimate.

Samoa's experience in this regard reflects a broader pattern across the Pacific, with Chinese aid to the region — much in the form of high-profile infrastructure projects — doubling between 2008 and 2016, according to Australian think-tank the Lowy Institute. Although often paid for through concessional, low-interest loans, the sheer scale of this assistance has raised concerns about the risks posed to small economies such as Samoa's, which the International Monetary Fund considers at high risk of debt stress. US officials allege China's lending practices amount to "predatory economics" or "payday loan diplomacy" — using foreign aid to secure leverage over indebted Pacific governments.

"We still owe China $400 million in debts from the past. We do not have enough coconuts to repay the Chinese back for all these loans," said local MP Faumuina Wayne Fong in relation to the proposed port development. "Why would a small country like Samoa with exports of about 30 per cent of [its economic output] and imports about 40 per cent of [its economy] need a wharf to cater for 12 vessels?" he asked. "Definitely not for exports and imports hence why I say it must be a military wharf."

But to Tuilaʻepa, these concerns fail to account for the fact that China's support usually comes at Samoa's request — often when other partners aren't willing to help. This was the case with both the upgrades to the international airport terminal and the proposed port development, Tuilaʻepa says, with the Asian Development Bank deeming the latter project unviable.

"What is most important in your loan management is to ensure that your loan repayment capacity is strong," Tuilaʻepa says. "When you borrow for a development project, that development project will help you to raise your GDP and pay off the loan. So these projects contribute to the raising of GDP, which helps to improve per capita income of the people."

However, Tuilaʻepa is frank that this support does come with expectations — but says this is not unique to China. "China has done quite a lot. But they also request us for help. And we can help. Usually, the most often requested help is the same as what New Zealand, Australia, Japan, America request — the vote. The vote is our extremely powerful tool to pay back the kindness of nations to Samoa."

Despite the persistence of the debt-trap narrative, the evidence to support it appears to be weakening. A 2019 report from the Lowy Institute found that China was not engaging in deliberate debt-trap diplomacy in the Pacific, but noted that concerns remained about the sheer scale of borrowing. Chinese President Xi Jinping has himself emphasised the need to ensure debt sustainability for future aid projects. China's aid to the Pacific has in fact declined since 2016.

Nonetheless, soon after taking office in July 2021, the newly elected prime minister, Afioga Fiamē Naomi Mataʻafa — Tuilaʻepa's former deputy — confirmed that the Vaiusu Bay development would not be proceeding,

Prime Minister Fiamē, above, at the launch of a Japanese-funded ferry in November. Fiamē pulled the plug on a proposed Chinese-funded port development in 2021, following an election in which she said Samoa's indebtedness to China was a "pressing issue for voters". Below, a boat at anchor in Apia Bay with the Immaculate Conception Cathedral behind it.

Luafau Leia Tuulima, left, mayor of Magiagi village. Above, former Attorney-General Ming Leung Wai.

calling the plan excessive for the country's needs. International observers were quick to read into this decision a pivot away from Beijing under the new administration. But almost immediately, the new prime minister sought to dispel this suggestion. "It could have been any other donor," Fiamē told RNZ, describing the decision as simply a matter of prioritisation. On the big island of Sava'i, another port development tied to China remains under consideration.

> **"If you would ask me what was the number one issue now, it's basically our workers leaving for overseas, to New Zealand and Australia."**

Watching events unfold from party headquarters, former Prime Minister Tuila'epa doubts there has been any fundamental change of orientation under the new administration. "When you enter into a friendship treaty agreement, you are expected to honour that," he says, referring to the 1975 agreement marking the start of diplomatic relations between the countries.

The cancellation of the Vaiusu Bay project still rankles with him, especially the suggestion that there was ever a military aspect to it. "It's ridiculous to expect a big country to come and have a base here in a small country. But it is in an argument, because there are anti-Chinese people, not only here but in New Zealand. They just speak on anything that will influence the minds of the people to protest."

In the village of Magiagi on the outskirts of the island of Upolu, Mayor Luafau Leia Tuulima Aimaasu is grappling with a decision that could divide his community: whether to follow a growing number of villages in banning Chinese businesses from operating on village land.

"The business owners or shop owners in the village are the most to disapprove of letting Chinese businesses into the village because they say it'll steal their customers and so forth, because as we all know the Chinese shops have cheap products," Luafau explains, sitting in the shade of the car port behind his family home. "But if we look at the beneficial side of things, considering what is good for every family in the village . . . if we let Chinese businesses in, the village will benefit from our lands which we can lease to them for their businesses, as well as the price of Chinese products, much more cheaper for families."

Samoa's Chinese community dates back over 150 years, with migrants arriving first as free settlers, then as indentured labourers. The impact of this migration is everywhere, from local culinary staples such as keke pua'a (pork buns) and sapasui (chop suey), to names like Chan Mow and Ah Liki that adorn prominent businesses downtown. Around one in three Samoans, including 20 per cent per cent of MPs, are estimated to claim Chinese ancestry. But now a new wave of migration tied to China's rise is bringing new challenges — as the decision Luafau and his village are facing shows.

Former Attorney-General Tuatagaloa Aumua Ming Leung Wai is one of those Samoans with Chinese ancestry. Now a barrister, Leung Wai has written about the history of Samoa's Chinese community, and believes these deep ties play a role in the close relationship between the two countries. However, there are now "mixed feelings" about the more recent wave of migration, he says.

"The locals will be comparing the new wave of Chinese with the previous waves. With the previous waves they integrated into society, took up chiefly titles, basically assimilated into our Samoan society. With the new wave, particularly the Chinese without any blood connections to Samoa, they will usually marry Chinese and are not very involved with the community. They're more interested in just running the business."

Leung Wai says the success of many of these businesses has brought benefits to consumers — "but on the other side of the coin, there's the locals who run their own shops. In small shops in the villages, I think they're facing a lot of competition. If they can't compete, they'll have to close shop." These concerns are not just felt in the villages. One prominent local business person, who asked not to be named, expressed concern about Chinese businesses undercutting local competitors, possibly by not paying tax.

One 2015 survey by then University of Otago academic Dr Iati Iati identified fear of Chinese domination of the business sector as a major theme among respondents. In recent years, there have been a number of attacks on the owners and employees of Chinese businesses in Samoa, one resulting in death. Chinese businesses have also been the subject of violence in other Pacific states, such as during rioting in Honiara in 2014.

However, CEO of the Samoan Chamber Commerce Lemauga Hobart Vaai says that away from the villages Chinese investment is largely welcomed — and often preferred over that from New Zealand and Australian businesses.

"The Chinese, they're just more direct. Let's just get things moving, get it done straight away," Vaai says. "If you were to tell me which country would probably be most advantageous in terms of investment, because of that lack of red tape, because of that directness that the Chinese have, they seem to be much more favourable when it comes to partnership investments.

"If you would ask me what was the number one issue now, it's basically our workers leaving for overseas, to New Zealand and Australia," Vaai says. Indeed, that night, at a Chamber of Commerce meeting of local businesses, the main topic of contention is the loss of workers to New Zealand and Australia.

Out the back of a store in Vaitele, I speak to one of the more successful members of Samoa's new Chinese community. As the birthday balloons above his desk inform me, Nianda Weng is only 23, but is already general manager of Samoa's most prominent fast-food brand and a chain of retail stores. He is a busy man. "The only time I rest is when I'm asleep," he tells me, while driving to lunch in his BMW. Born in China, Weng moved to New Zealand when he was three, where his parents started the Coin Save franchise, operating 72 branches at its peak. When the GFC hit, Weng's father recalled a Samoan customer's offhand comment that there were no stores like it back home. Now, Samoa is home. "My father said he wants to be buried here. When you want to be buried somewhere, I think that's where your heart stays," Weng says.

Weng says he hasn't experienced any resentment or discrimination personally while in Samoa. "Well, I haven't experienced anything because, you know, I try to respect everyone. If you disrespect someone, it doesn't matter what race you are."

In a farm on the outskirts of Apia, Dr Jim Liu, senior agronomist for China Aid, moves through the rows of crops, pointing out the quite literal fruits of over a decade's work on China's largest demonstration farm in the South Pacific.

CEO of the Samoa Chamber of Commerce Hobart Vaai says local businesses often prefer working with Chinese entities over their Australian or New Zealand counterparts.

> **"China thinks of itself as a developing country. But we may be better developed than some in the field of agriculture. Therefore we are willing to share this agricultural technology and experience with other developing countries."**

For weeks I have been trying to talk to China's ambassador to Samoa, Chao Xiaoliang, to hear first-hand about his government's interests in Samoa. But after two written requests, five visits to the embassy and multiple phone calls, I decide to head for one of China's aid projects to find someone else to talk to. (I do eventually encounter the ambassador, aboard the inaugural sailing of a ferry donated by Japan. He is polite but firm: "It's a very sensitive topic. I don't know what I can say.")

When I first find Dr Liu, he is preparing for a presentation to local officials on the Samoa-China Agriculture Technical Assistance Project — or SCATAP

“This benefits the people and the country of the recipients, but it’s also good for China,” says China Aid agronomist Dr Jim Liu.

— a programme aimed at improving agriculture in Samoa through farming demonstrations, technology transfers, and training. As I sit down on a plastic chair, one of Dr Liu’s assistants hands me a cup of coffee, brewed with coffee beans grown on site — one of more than 40 crop varieties grown here. My visit is unexpected but Dr Liu doesn’t seem bothered, speaking freely about his work and the common criticisms about China’s Pacific presence, while showing me around the farm.

“China thinks of itself as a developing country. But we may be better developed than some in the field of agriculture. Therefore we are willing to share this agricultural technology and experience with other developing countries. This benefits the people and the country of the recipients. But it’s also good for China, because China is importing lots of agricultural products. We hope agriculture production could be improved all over the world,” he says.

“There’s no grounds for suspicion. Whether the project will continue or not completely depends on the request of the recipient government. If you do not need it, you can stop it. It’s very simple. It’s not because China wants to increase its influence.”

Few but the most hawkish of China-watchers would deny the benefits brought by Chinese aid to countries like Samoa. The controversy is over what Beijing wants in return. The contention from critics is that Chinese aid and diplomacy is part of a broader scheme by Beijing to shape the world in its image.

One prominent example is the work of high-profile scholar Professor Anne Marie Brady, who has detailed what she considers to be concerted programmes of foreign interference by the Chinese Communist Party, winning extensive coverage in the international press and prompting a parliamentary inquiry into foreign interference in New Zealand. In the Pacific, she has accused Beijing of “sponsoring political interference activities that undermine democracy and weaken already fragile political systems”, such as by using financial inducements to win over local elites. (Brady did not respond to a request to be interviewed for this article.)

Dr Jason Young, the director of the New Zealand Contemporary China Research Centre in Wellington, says China’s engagement in the Pacific reflects a broader global effort to position itself as a “viable alternative” to the currently advanced economies of the world — which includes “trying to shape international affairs and how other states engage with China to make the world safe for the Chinese political system”.

He says all great powers will try to shape their external environment to their advantage. “China does the same thing, in the sense that it will, for example, not do agreements with countries that have diplomatic relations with Taiwan, it will publish Chinese government written pieces in local newspapers to shape public opinion, and it has outreach programmes — things like the Confucius Institute — to try to shape how people think about policy issues.

“That’s not just in the Pacific, that’s all over the world. We’re seeing a major uptick in the amount of government-led initiatives and media — some of it very open, some more coercive — that is trying to reshape public opinion and policies towards China.”

Young says China has used its growing influence to push back against criticism of its human-rights record. “In the case of Xinjiang, where there’s credible reports of really concerning human rights issues in the region, there’s been a campaign to counter that argument all over the world, including in New Zealand and the Pacific, through media, through official engagements, through events, to pressure governments not to stand up and criticise China’s human rights record.”

Just as New Zealand has its China experts, China has its New Zealand experts. Professor Chen Hong — director of the New Zealand and Australian Studies Centres at East China Normal University in Shanghai — is one of them. He has been directly affected by the concern over China’s foreign-interference activities. In 2020, his Australian visa was revoked on the grounds that he was deemed a security threat because of his participation in a WeChat group of which a former Labor Party staffer was also a member — an episode Chen describes as “farcical”. “I’ve been asking them to provide any evidence, but there hasn’t been any evidence at all,” he says.

In Chen’s view, much of the concern about China’s influence abroad is based on a “misunderstanding” about China’s interests abroad. “China doesn’t have this kind of grand strategy. China’s very much a self-contained economy and society. People don’t really think about the world with this kind of expansionist idea.

“Of course, what China has been doing has been serving its own economic benefits — that is to work with local countries to do mining, farming, fishing, various areas. But on the other hand, what China has been doing has been helping the local infrastructure and also people’s livelihoods, creating jobs, in particular for example, schools and hospitals.

“All those things will be contributing towards making the local investments or business environments to be more conducive to a better environment for China to carry its business activities. So this will be for the purpose of serving the ultimate aim, which is to help with the local economy, which in turn helps China. So it’s two way. It’s mutually helpful.

“China’s collaboration with the island countries has been a success story, because it’s a two-way collaboration. The success is because the outcomes of those collaborations are very tangible. Roads, hospitals, and, for example, the police collaboration with the Solomon Islands, those are real tangible things. You see social order, you see there is no longer social turmoil. I think that has been convincing people. Ordinary people have wisdom. They’ve got intelligence. They’re able to discern facts from propaganda. So when they experience good things, they think that’s good.”

Chen says all donors expect to get something in return for their investment. “If a country such as the United States, Australia, or New Zealand is supporting one island country seemingly with no particular purpose in return, well then that’s very good. It’s altruistic. It’s something that is very grand, very good morally. But really, what we see in the United States, Australia, or some other countries has been they expect something in return. They want to help with providing some aid, but with an expectation there will be influence. Well, that is political influence.

“Aid programmes from Australia, from the United States, have not been for building the road works, port or infrastructure. They help with social-reform activity, which is of course very good. But in that way, they are actually helping with installing a kind of Western-style governance system.

“Of course, anything that is conducive to development, whether it’s social or economic, that is good. But I don’t think actually China is doing anything like this. I don’t think China wants to influence the local political system, to transform the governance into a kind of a Chinese model. This is definitely not the case. That, I think, is actually one of the differences, which is quite fundamental.”

Olivia and Francesco, young Samoans who studied in China on scholarships funded by the Chinese government.

Whatever Beijing’s intentions — grand or otherwise — there can be little doubt its growing presence is shaping the perceptions of those it touches. In Apia, at the offices of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation — a building constructed with Chinese aid — two young Samoans tell me how their lives were transformed by scholarships, funded by the Chinese government, to live and study in China.

“I was a bit worried going into a communist country. I was worried about that sense of control. I thought I’d lose my rights,” Olivia recalls. “And then when you’re there, it’s completely different. There’s a lot of freedom. I wasn’t sure if it was just as a foreigner, but I did speak to my Chinese friends about this, and they said, ‘No, it’s just relaxed. As long as you follow the rules, you don’t get in trouble.' It's like everywhere else in the world."

Following his experiences, Francesco says he has more favourable perceptions of China than the US, mentioning gun violence as a major factor informing his view of America. "I prefer China because the people are very determined, and for me actions speak louder," he says. "I feel like if I went to America, I might say something that might offend them, and next minute something happens. I've seen more problems on the news regarding USA than China."

Around the world, perceptions like this are becoming the new normal. A recent Cambridge University study found that China is now perceived more favourably than the US in the developing world — especially among the 4.6 billion people living in countries supported by China's Belt and Road Initiative. By contrast, the number of people in the developed world with a positive view of China has halved in the past five years.

But Olivia and Francesco's perspectives remain nuanced. "For me, I'm like a coin that has two sides," Olivia says. "I understand where the media comes from. Because there have been cases where it does look very wrong. But sometimes I feel like it's the world against China. And it's kind of sad, especially for me, for someone that's benefited."

"To think that Pacific Island countries are suddenly going to roll over and let any country impose their values on them is just ridiculous."

To New-Zealand Samoan academic Dr Iati Iati, much of the concern about China in the Pacific boils down to something more fundamental. "There has been a lot of fearmongering from the West — and that's because they are starting to lose their grip or their hold over the region. These countries are becoming more independent, not so dependent on them, but having more options in terms of aid donors and who they can go to for assistance without having to be subject to conditions like the ones that have been imposed by the West.

"Pacific Island countries have a centuries old history of their cultural traditions which they hold on to very strongly. So to think that Pacific Island countries are suddenly going to roll over and let any country impose their values on them is just ridiculous."

When New Zealand troops landed at Apia in 1914, seizing the islands from Germany, one of the first acts of the new administration was to direct police to brutally disperse Chinese labourers who gathered downtown using clubs. The perceived "menace" of the local Chinese population was an almost constant preoccupation of Samoa's early New Zealand administrators, who banned marriages between Samoans and Chinese, prohibited Chinese from entering Samoan households, and forcibly repatriated over half of the Chinese population within four years. Over a century on, the fortunes of New Zealand, Samoa and China remain intertwined.

Michael Powles is one man who has had a unique vantage point for these transformations through a long career in the diplomatic corps, including as New Zealand's ambassador to China in the early 1990s and, previously, as its high commissioner to Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu. As a child, he spent much of his time in Samoa, where his father was high commissioner, tasked by then Prime Minister Peter Fraser with securing Samoa's independence. Over the decades he has witnessed huge changes, mostly for the better, but says old attitudes sometimes linger.

"Attitudes change a bit. They don't necessary change totally," he says. "In some ways in the Pacific, we think we are full of good intentions — and that's not too untrue. We also think sometimes that we know best, and that sometimes is not true. We don't necessarily have the same image to other people that we think we have.

"Some of our good friends think there are some sort of devious and nasty motives on the Chinese side. I think that's not necessarily so. They don't always behave terribly well, but goodness me — we and the other colonial powers haven't always behaved terribly well either."

In Powles' view, this dynamic can be seen playing out in the controversy over China in the Pacific. "I think it comes up against this notion of self-determination. If the Samoans and the Tongans and others want to do X or Y, and want to include China in it, are we going to say, 'no, you can't do it'? And if we try and say no, what's the consequence of saying no? I think if we were to say no, they're quite likely to say 'well, get stuffed'."

In the subtle ways of international diplomacy, Pacific leaders may already be doing just that.

Late last May, in the wake of the China-Solomons security deal, Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi embarked on a whirlwind tour of 10 Pacific island states with the aim of securing agreement to a "Common Development Vision" — an expansive multilateral plan covering trade, law enforcement, fisheries planning, disaster relief, Covid-19, among other things.

By the end of the tour, China had inked 52 new bilateral agreements with Pacific leaders. But the regional pact remained unsigned. Pacific leaders were not ready to agree to it. This was not the rebuke of Beijing that Washington wanted it to be, but the comments of Pacific leaders in the weeks that followed made clear a desire for the Pacific to forge its own way — free from both Chinese and Western pressure.

"We have very small opportunities where we have the advantage, and our advantage is when our views are combined together to represent the Pacific," Samoan prime minister Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa explained at a press conference for local media.

She noted that New Zealand, Australia and the US

SAMOA MO SAMOA
Office of the Mau

Members of the Mau, Samoa's non-violent independent movement, in front of their headquarters in Vaimoso, 1929.

PHOTO BY ALFRED JAMES TATTERSALL, ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY

had all insisted that Samoa speak to the Solomons about their concerns over the security deal with China. But she hadn't, because she saw this as a matter for regional discussion.

She also noted the inconsistency in the lack of controversy over security pacts pushed by the West without Pacific input — such as AUKUS, which could see Australian nuclear-powered submarines prowling Pacific waters. "There are times they choose to talk to us and there are times they go on their own," Fiamē said. "We have been in partnership with these major powers for a long time. What's new now that they seem to be seeking support in the Pacific?"

As it stands, concern over a Chinese military presence in the South Pacific remains just that. Both the Solomons and China have reiterated that there will be no military base or no-long term Chinese military presence under their security deal. To date, there is only one Chinese military base abroad — a naval facility in Djibouti on the horn of Africa. By contrast, the US has around 750 bases in at least 80 countries, including in the Pacific in Guam, the Marshall Islands, Okinawa and Hawaii. New facilities are currently under construction in Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands.

As former Prime Minister Tuilaʻepa puts it: "We tend to look at everybody as a friend. You and your friends are our friends. Your enemies are not our enemies. So why should we be dragged into things that are far beyond our concern?

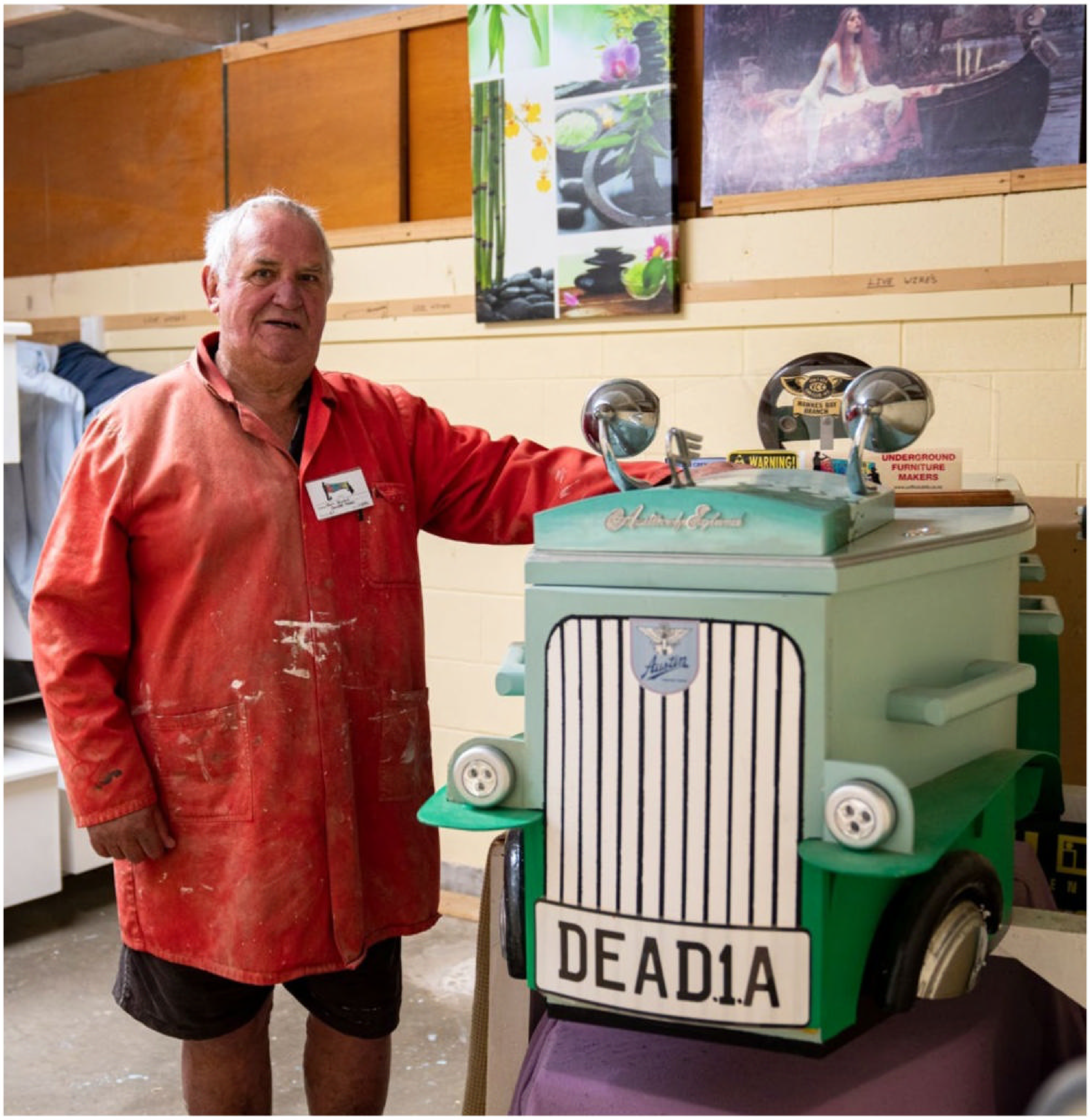
"All we are interested in is a development, a road, a school building, which may seem tiny to a big country, but to us is big. All we are interested in is improvement of the rights of our people. It is uncalled for to try and drag us small countries to become involved in geopolitical issues that are far, far beyond our priority."

One Friday night, drinks fly from the bar at a high-end hotel on Mulinuʻu Peninsula in Apia. Upstairs, politicians, businesspeople and media are celebrating Australian company Telstra's takeover of a local telecommunications company, which some had feared might fall into Chinese ownership. Downstairs, the new US Chargé d'affaires Noriko Horiuchi — Washington's most senior representative in the country — entertains local journalists as part of a regular "media mingle". Nobody is talking about China, and yet everyone is.

Outside, Samoan flags line the road in celebration of the 60th anniversary of Samoa's independence. Up the road to the left is where New Zealand authorities once imprisoned hundreds of members of the Mau, Samoa's independence movement. Further down the road to the right is where New Zealand authorities shot down the leader of the Mau, Tupua Tamasese Lealofi III, on Black Saturday in 1929, the darkest day of New Zealand's rule. Nearly a century on, New Zealand today considers itself Samoa's closest friend — and not without foundation. But it is to a different friendship that a park opened last July, in the very heart of Apia, is dedicated. ■

Ollie Neas is a Wellington-based journalist and barrister. Additional reporting and translation by Talaia Mika.

Out of the Box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The "happiest club in Hawke's Bay" helps people get used to the idea of death – and exit the mortal world in style.

BY TOBIAS BUCK

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RICHARD BRIMER

The summer sun in Hawke's Bay always feels nuclear. Hot on the skin, it obliterates shadow. In the centre of Hastings, on any given late January afternoon, the asphalt car park outside Kmart feels it's liable to melt underfoot.

That's what the region's known for — all that brightness and light. The beach is nearby if you want to cool off, and there's always the beloved waterpark Splash Planet for the kids, with hotdogs, candyfloss and mega-size ice-cold drinks you can sip after floating down the lazy river. In Fantasyland, the park's oldest play area, there once stood a full-size playground pirate ship that looked like something out of Peter Pan. That is, until it was destroyed in an arson attack in 2015.

Near the waterpark in Hastings, down a drive on the street opposite the local sports field — where the old netball courts used to be — you'll find a pale-coloured two-storey pavilion with a sprinkling of white plastic chairs arranged outside. There's a pool, and an indoor gym, and a race track used regularly by the Hawke's Bay Radio Controlled Car Club. Pickleball Hawke's Bay sets up at the outdoor courts here most weekdays, but on Tuesdays — and every second Saturday or so — this is the domain of a group with a markedly different agenda.

They arrive industrious and cheery, these makers of "underground furniture" — some for themselves, some for others. They've come here to make coffins.

It's with some glee that 76-year-old Kevin Heyward, grey-haired in overalls, hammer in hand, shows me the coffin he plans to be buried in.

Shaped like a downhill-derby racer, it's a big piece of construction. Heyward, who used to be a member of the Austin Car Club, has painted it to look like a classic Austin Healey. At the front he's added a personalised licence plate that reads "DEAD1A". "My grandkids gotta start weight-training to lift it up," he says.

Heyward is a long-time member of the Hawke's Bay Coffin Club, which began in 2014 to give members the chance to personalise their own coffins. It also provides a service for those who can't afford a funeral or even a casket, making it easier to exit earth with a little extra dignity. It's one of several such volunteer-run clubs in New Zealand, supplying coffins to beneficiaries and anyone else who either can't afford (or simply doesn't want) to spend much on their funeral arrangements.

The club also facilitates discussions about death and dying through its sociable meet-ups. Membership is $30 a year, which gets you access to resources including nails, glue, lining, paint brushes and a generous amount of tea and fruitcake. Plus, you get a discount at Paint Spot on Maraekakaho Road when buying your coffin's top-coat paint colour.

"We're the happiest club in Hawke's Bay," says club secretary Helen Bromley. It is quickly apparent at one of the club's regular get-togethers that this could well be the case. Members are chatty and energetic. Prized for their carpentry, painting and sewing skills, they're happy to share stories. Some say they have joined to take pressure and responsibility off their families, but most see the club as a practical service for others; sharing their skills to give back to their community.

Right now the club is on a recruitment drive. Members upload videos to YouTube, regularly post photos and updates on Facebook and put bumper stickers on their cars. At this year's Hawke's Bay Blossom Parade they turned a coffin into a buggy with wheels, dressed themselves as funeral directors, and rolled it down the street. "It was a great day," Bromley says cheerfully. "The whole thing went so well. We think we haven't had new members for a while then we suddenly do." A lady from Eskdale has just started coming in. And one from Taradale, she adds. "That's two!"

Meet-ups are busy. Coffins can't be stored on site indefinitely, so volunteers are given up to four months to finish them. (Before each coffin reaches its final destination six feet under, it will typically be stored at home, or in the garage, making a striking conversation starter). The basic coffins are MDF and come with two layers of undercoat, a baseboard and a plastic liner (mandatory by law), handles and lid-screws. The club completes them with two top coats in your colour of choice, and pads the baseboard and sides with duvet inner and whatever lining you'd prefer.

The coffins arrive in three shapes: tapered (wide at the top), the classic hexagonal casket shape, and oblong. The club will measure people against the wall and, if you're too short or tall for the coffins on hand, they're happy to make you one custom-sized. Members with basic carpentry and joinery skills share their knowledge with others, and artists and painters offer their expertise with decoration — though some people want a plain coffin, or an urgent one, which can also be arranged.

"We've had coffins painted with all the colours of the rainbow and, in fact, a rainbow coffin done," Bromley says. Glitter is not unheard of either. One club member recently had a blue and white coffin made, with Snoopy painted on the lid. A woman who has travelled extensively has covered her coffin with photos of countries she has visited, along with personal photos. The lining material is black, with the names of countries and cities of the world written in gold — she has even attached baggage labels to the handles. She has left blank spaces for places she still plans to visit. "I'm not planning to jump into mine just yet," she assures me.

This is a common refrain from the club's members who are, for the most part, not-quite-seniors. In fact there's more of a mix of ages than you might expect, as I discover at a morning tea featuring shared home-made fruitcake and scones.

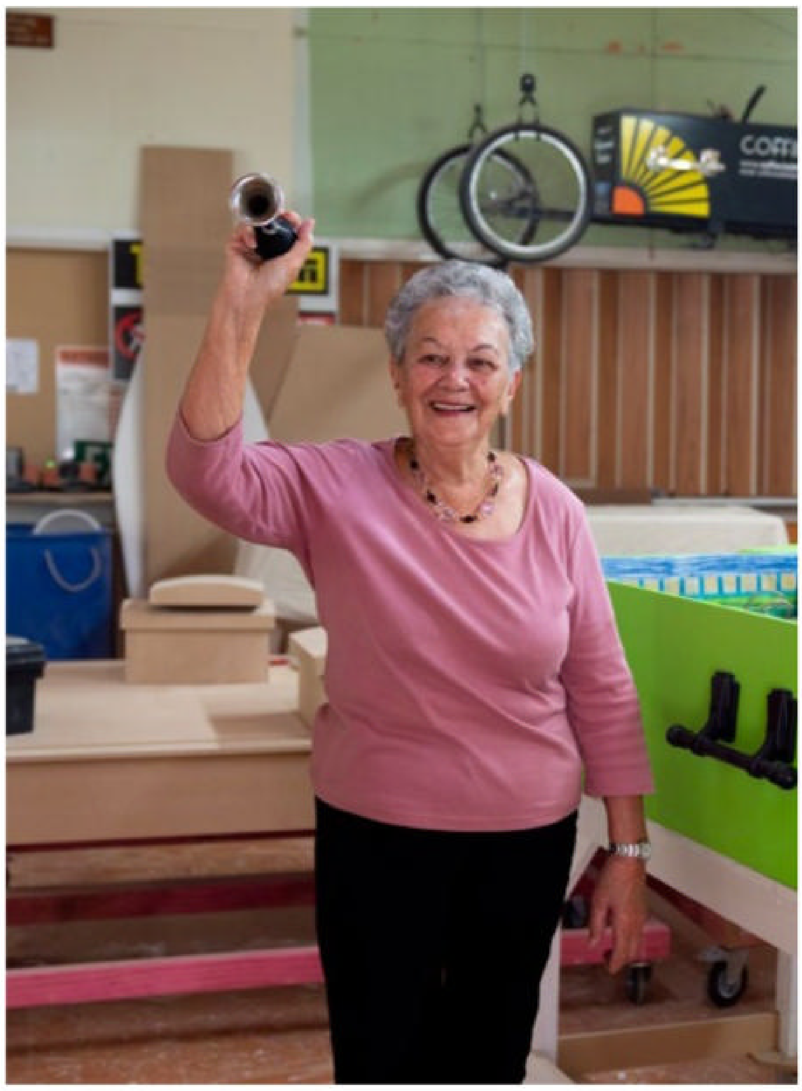
There's a mix of cultural backgrounds, and an equal mix of women and men. Some joined the club after seeing the sign and becoming intrigued, others through friends who had their coffins made at the club. After one woman signed up, she says her mother-in-law told her there were "no surprises there — you've always been off the wall".

Peter McCormick, a new member, says he joined for social reasons at the behest of his wife, who was

worried by how much time he was spending chatting to their dog. “She said I should give it a go or before long she’d wonder what was going on with me and that bearded collie.” Another member joined at the start of the pandemic, and ended up staying on. “You come in fearing death but it becomes part of life. It’s just wonderful.”

Bromley herself became involved in 2016, after finding herself with a spare length of white satin. “I’d done a lot of dressmaking and had this big chunk of satin left over from my granddaughter’s flower girl dress,” she says. “I thought, what am I gonna do with this? It was just sitting in my sewing box.” There was a lady she saw interviewed on television talking about baby coffins, and she rang to get in touch. “When

Previous page, Kevin Heyward with his coffin. This page from top, Ted Bos, Ivan Linnell and Brian Steels. Opposite page from top: Judith Aitken (left) and Helen Bromley; Mary Waitoa; Jim Mundy (left) and Michael Balfour.



I got hold of her she asked 'Are you any good with computers?'" As it happened, Bromley had just finished work as the administration manager at the Hastings Chamber of Commerce. Within a year, she was the Coffin Club's secretary — and her piece of white satin was lining the coffin of a local stranger in need.

In New Zealand, the average funeral costs about $10,000, and the average coffin north of $1,000. (Work and Income will provide a funeral grant of up to $2,280 for low-income families, but this has been criticised as nowhere near enough to cover costs.) Earlier this year, funeral directors in Northland said more people were opting to be cremated with no service after the price of caskets rose, thanks in part to an increase in wood and fabric prices. By comparison, the Hastings Coffin Club can supply you with a coffin for just $600 — and, since it's yours, you can decorate it

however you wish. The rate has attracted people from well beyond Hastings. "We've done coffins for people in Dannevirke, Napier, and Gisborne," says Heyward. "A guy came down from Thames requesting three coffins for his mates. He took them all back on his trailer."

All the club's coffins are accepted by Hawke's Bay funeral directors and at the Hastings District Council Crematorium. The latter has also started commissioning ashes boxes from the club, after deciding it wanted to source the boxes locally. It orders about 200 at a time: 100 small, 50 medium and 50 large, Heyward says. Each order provides extra money needed to cover the club's overheads.

Out the back of the community centre's workshop there's a separate room, where baby coffins are kept stacked on three shelves. They tend to be white, with stickers and motifs of flowers, butterflies, teddies and toys on the lids.

"We donate to Ata Rangi, the maternity unit at Hawke's Bay Hospital," Bromley explains. They also supply baby coffins to Gisborne Hospital, midwives in Wairoa and Whanganui, and any community member who needs one. Bromley doesn't like lining the small coffins with white satin anymore, preferring instead printed fabric from Spotlight; flannelette or soft cotton — something warm and suitable for kids. Club members knit what are known as "angel pockets", a kind of blanket babies are wrapped in so their bereaved parents can hold them after they die. The women also knit crochet tiny hats and little pillows. When they're finished, they're sent to a place in the hospital called the Butterfly Room, which is full of coffins, nightgowns, blankets, quilts and beanies. "A mother can choose what they want," says Bromley. "It's important that they can choose."

As a society, we aren't great at talking about death — and especially not the practicalities of what happens when people die. It can be hard to face, and it can be sudden. "There's an element of forethought the Coffin Club represents that is as important as the actual coffin-making," Bromley says. "I used to work in a bank. I know about Powers of Attorney and planning ahead. That's what takes away the stress from bereaved families." She's helped plan funerals for family members and has practical support to offer, as well as empathy. "Most people have just never dealt with a dead person and don't know what to expect." She hasn't got round to making her own coffin yet, though. "I don't know if there's room. It'll have to go in the shed with the wood when I do."

One club member tells me that her family finds her membership "quite morbid". "They're not really open about death." When she visits, her mum won't get out of the car. But the club takes that fear away. "It's fun," she says. "It changes your attitude." Painting a coffin is a bit like decorating your final bedroom, adds Cherie Hames, the club's treasurer. "It's just more of the same. You decorate your car and your home. Every aspect of your life. Why wouldn't you do the same for your coffin too?" ■

Tobias Buck is a *North & South* contributing writer.

Morning tea break during a meet-up. Please take turns bringing home baking.

EXPLORING THE EDGE

For 60 years, the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California has attracted spiritual seekers, social changemakers and psychedelic explorers. But the birthplace of the human potential movement also created cult leaders like Bert Potter. Now its focus is on Indigenous reconciliation.

BY ANKE RICHTER

There can only be one place in the world where you find yourself naked in sulphurous water and sea breeze, touching knees in the dark with a *New York Times* bestselling wellness author, a start-up entrepreneur, a psychiatrist from Harvard and a PhD candidate who researches tantric sex. The first thing I hear when I slide in next to her in the concrete pond is a reference to her “inner child”. My arrival at the hot pools doesn’t stop the confessional flow around me. They don’t do small talk at Esalen — people tend to be as open as the starry sky above us.

PHOTO DICK ROWAN, US NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Esalen founders and college friends Dick Price, left, and Mike Murphy, who saw the potential in "human potential".

PHOTO COURTESY ESALEN INSTITUTE AND ESALEN CENTER FOR THEORY & RESEARCH

Coming here means going to the edge. Literally. The stylish open-air baths where clothing is optional sit only metres above the crashing surf under a steep cliff face of California's west coast. They are an iconic feature of the seminar centre in Big Sur, three hours drive south of San Francisco. I'm here for a "self-guided exploration" that includes morning yoga classes and daily sessions called "Resting for Resilience" or "Making Space for the Sacred". The pools are free to use for all guests around the clock, but a trademark 75-minute Esalen massage would add another US$230 to the already steep price tag. I'm resistant to making space for that yet.

Stunningly located just below the Pacific Coast Highway on over 11 hectares, with weathered buildings and a small organic farm, the Esalen Institute is a retreat centre as well as a hothouse for personal development. In its 60 years, it has birthed new-age gurus, hosted Silicon Valley think tanks, dabbled in drug experiments and facilitated secret peace meetings between CIA and KGB agents, since known as "hot-tub diplomacy". It has been spoofed in Hollywood movies like *Serial, Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice* and *Inherent Vice* and has re-emerged as a stronghold of the psychedelics renaissance, with Michael Pollan, author of the bestselling book and Netflix series *How to Change Your Mind*, a prominent faculty member of the Esalen Institute. The latest rumour circulating this enclave — false but fitting its mythos — is that it has been bought by Elon Musk.

Countless celebrities, artists and intellectuals have soaked in the springs, wandered among the redwood trees and sat in the wood-clad lodge overlooking the ocean. Folk festivals and marriages have taken place here. Even a famous fictional character had a dip and a deep dive. In the final episode of the hit series *Mad Men*, Don Draper leaves the advertising rat race for the mystical mecca of counterculture. After he reluctantly joins an encounter therapy group for his soul-searching, Draper ends up in tears. Maybe he got in touch with his inner child.

TRUTHS AND THERAPIES

"A lot of things happen here that are hard to explain," JJ Jeffries tells our group of a dozen self-explorers in the welcoming circle above the lodge. He has a wide smile and a grey ponytail and has been part of the staff for 20 years, since the days when everyone at Esalen was into Gestalt therapy. Staff had daily "check-ins" and weekly "processes".

A lot has changed since then. Ten years ago, the holistic hub where travelling hippies once camped on the driveway had a management restructure to attract a more upmarket clientele. That didn't go down well. Esalen's 50th anniversary was overshadowed by protests over the direction of the privately-owned non-profit. Staff and supporters stood outside the lodge in a "grieving circle" every day, claiming that it was going corporate and selling its soul. An "Esaleaks" website emerged while Esalen started holding exclusive weekends for Google, Apple and Facebook executives.

Alongside the palace revolution and financial struggles, the cliff-hanging enterprise had its share of natural disasters in a precarious environment: mudslides, fires and an El Niño storm where the baths ended up in the ocean. Then the pandemic hit, another fire and evacuation. The centre managed to reopen, with Covid testing and mandatory vaccination passes on arrival. Gazebo Park, a kindergarten built in 1978 for residents' children (currently 45 of Esalen's 100 employees live on site) and based around Gestalt principles like self-reliance is now a nature-based "forest school" open to local pre-schoolers.

Jeffries is one of the few Gestalt teachers left. He describes his vocation as "an awareness practice that is really good about noticing hidden patterns and beliefs", then encourages us to get up for a dance. "Come on, move your hips — you spent a lot of money coming here!" He laughs and turns on the music. "To change your life, you have to change how you think, and move."

Bodywork like rolfing and Feldenkrais, encounter therapy and Gestalt therapy kicked off at Esalen in the 1960s and became hallmarks of the human potential movement. The term "human potential" was coined by *Brave New World* author Aldous Huxley and taken on by Esalen's founders Dick Price and Mike Murphy, both idealistic Stanford graduates with a dream to change the world, starting at the core of each human being.

The former had endured a horrific episode in a mental hospital; the latter became a golfing yogi after a stint in India. His family owned the modest Big Sur Hot Springs with a motel and a bar that were transformed by Price and Murphy into something more utopian. They gathered an eclectic in-group of resident psychologists and visionaries, who pioneered everything wild and wacky that promised personal growth, from Eastern philosophies to mescalin and LSD — legal at the time. Not all endeavours were

Gestalt founder and groper Fritz Perls, later described as a “misanthropic septuagenarian in a jumpsuit”.

enlightening. Some psychonauts ended up with psychosis. Some killed themselves.

The encounter groups were radical too: Everything raw, emotional and repressed was to be let out between participants, the more physically unrestrained the better. Risk — and sex — was part of the adventure. In one heated group incident, a man was thrown through a closed window.

Indian new-age guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, later known as Osho, copied these pressure cooker methods at his ashram in Pune in the 1970s and took them to extremes. Besides sexual liberation, the confrontations led to workshop carnage like broken bones, mental collapse and even rape. In 2017, I visited the padded cellar rooms at Pune where those monstrosities once played out.

Another infamous cult leader closer to home got his first bearings from Esalen: Bert Potter, who would go on to start Centrepoint Community after his US visit. He later visited the ashram in Pune. In India, he got his idea to start a money-making, tax-free religious enterprise and call himself “God”. Potter went to jail in 1992 for sexually abusing children and manufacturing drugs. (Twenty years later, the late Potter still hovered like a ghost over the research I did for my book about the disastrous aftermath of Centrepoint, which left hundreds of people broken and traumatised.)

Centrepoint founder Bert Potter first encountered Esalen in *Playboy* and would use Gestalt therapy in his enterprises.

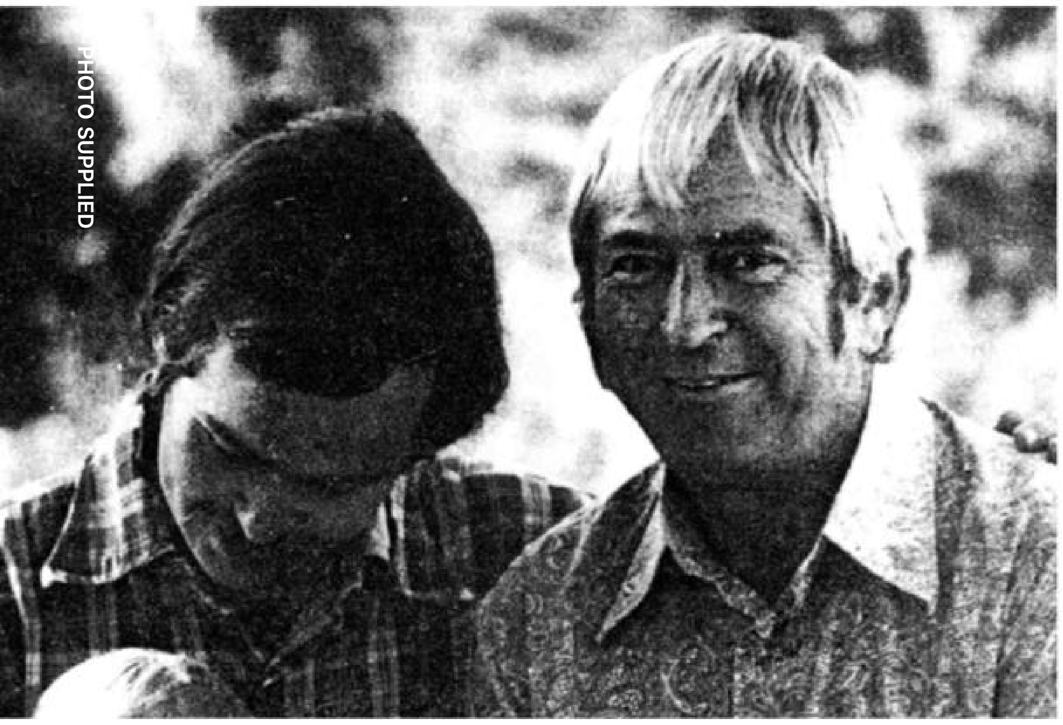


PHOTO SUPPLIED

A *Playboy* article about Esalen first caught Potter’s attention in the early 1970s. On his return from California, while still running a pest-control business, he set up the Shoreline Trust in Campbells Bay. Gestalt therapy was on offer at Shoreline, with its focus on internal processing and personal responsibility, with the aim of improving relationships. Not just his followers embraced it, but many local counsellors at the time. John Potter, who served prison time for two counts of indecent assault on underage girls, mentioned Esalen in his father’s eulogy in 2012. He said Bert had “practised being assertive” there and read books by Esalen regulars like Timothy Leary and Allen Ginsberg.

Potter’s Albany community became the antipodean appendix of the human potential movement — badly inflamed and doomed to burst. The Gestalt “hot seat”, where you sit in the middle screaming out your pain while banging a cushion, or receiving everyone’s brutally honest feedback about you, became a staple of Centrepoint workshops. Like German-born psychotherapist Fritz Perls, the father of Gestalt, Potter also had no intention of stopping anyone who came to him expressing thoughts of suicide.

While Potter’s atrocious acts can’t be blamed on Esalen, “careers, even cults would be made and broken here”, wrote Walter Truett Anderson in *The Upstart Spring*, which covers the first two decades of the institute.

I find Anderson’s fascinating book at the boutique gift shop among resort wear, bath salts and healthy snacks. The cassava crisps on the shelf are innocuously called “Cult Crackers”.

Anderson describes Perls, “an institution within the institute”, as a misanthropic septuagenarian in a jumpsuit who compulsively groped women’s genitals in the hot tub and slept with his patients.

Perls wouldn’t be the last predator in residence. Much later, but still before #MeToo, an older male yoga teacher from New Zealand allegedly fondled a young American student’s naked breasts and tried kissing her in the bath, which she told me about. “You can easily trick yourself there into thinking you’re the guru,” a wary Kiwi had told me. He was inappropriately touched by a think-tank leader in the changing room while on a course in 2011 and claims the complaint wasn’t followed up, unlike the yoga teacher incident. “They buy their own theatre and don’t recognize the pitfalls.”

I’m also aware of questionable Esalen superstars of the 70s, such as self-help lecturer Werner Erhard, “king of the brain snatchers”, who started est (Erhard Seminars Training). Labelled as a cult and a grift, est was the precursor to Landmark, another emporium with a hard sell that still runs large group awareness

PHOTOS COURTESY RACHEL DAVIES

Wellington psychotherapist Rachel Davies says the techniques she learned at Esalen "felt revolutionary". Below, Davies in the kitchen during her three-year stay.

trainings (LGAT). Cult experts like Janja Lalich, founder of the Lalich Center on Cults and Coercion, claim that LGATs can make participants more susceptible to undue influence. "Your brain chemistry reacts to the intensity, and you attribute the highs you experience to the leader," she says. Lalich is wary of the "pop psychology, scream therapy and all the attack therapy" which is also popular in Lifespring, another transformational coaching programme that has been blamed for driving people into suicide and breakdowns. "All cults use high-arousal techniques, whether it's music or chanting or speaking in tongues."

"SAY HI TO YOUR SOUL"

Arriving at Esalen with all this cult baggage on my mind doesn't lessen the appeal of the place though. Although fringe by mainstream standards, the current programme and biweekly "Voices of Esalen" podcast leans more towards social justice, diversity and progressive thinking than crystal-waving woo-woo. The organisation has a female CEO now, and women in senior leadership roles. According to its communications team, the institute sees itself "as metaphoric midwives and doulas of cutting-edge exploration", creating "a safe haven for big thinkers and wild dreamers". Mike Murphy, who's still a grey eminence in the background and charismatic as ever at 92, doesn't overshadow the place he co-created — he has long retired to Marin County.

Esalen's mantra since its early days of zen meditation is "the religion of no-religion": to remind people of who they really are, not to put hooks into them — nobody captures the flag, they say, but you hop on life's cosmic bus when you leave, questing onward. At the end of the first yoga session, instead of mumbling "namaste", we're encouraged to "bow to the greatest teacher: yourself" — and to the Esselen people, the native American stewards of the coastal waters and the land that the campus resides upon. Petals are sprinkled on the floor outside the room. A racoon ruffles through a bin.

My first impressions are more wonderful than weird, starting with the charming exterior: a quaint cottage stocked with art materials, a sofa swing among trees, a Buddha statue plastered with sentimental notes, and delicious buffet-style meals. Someone has arranged pebbles on a rock that read: "Say hi to your soul".

Then there are the guests themselves, the majority of them women. There's Shanna, a mother of three who works in tech and is "on a healing journey", including psychedelic therapy. She came here on her therapist's recommendation. "I'm realising I cannot access my feelings," she tells me while we soak up the sun on the deck, then thanks me for my "spontaneous gift of listening".

There's an older couple — she has insomnia, he fights an addiction — who attend the "Heart Essence of Recovery" evening class, a 12-step programme. There's wealthy Jim from Santa Barbara who loves the tranquillity here as much as the freedom of expression. Looking up from his journal, he says he's come for a reset. "Everyone is seeking something."

Another group of guests are health workers who suffered burn-out during the pandemic. They're restoring themselves in a more affordable month-long Live Extended Education Program (LEEP). Students sleep in dorms and help with cooking and cleaning while they learn about relaxation or mindfulness under the tutelage of scholars, in this case wellness author Lissa Rankin, whom I met in the bath.

Kiwi Esalen director Douglas Drummond (Ngāi Tahu) is working on reconciliation with the local Esselen tribe.

PHOTO ANKE RICHTER

Given the controversial history of Esalen, it's reassuring to hear that on the first day of her course, the medical doctor with a spiritual leaning spent hours to "cult proof" her group, as she tells me: Rankin acknowledged the built-in power differential and encouraged students to give her critical feedback, to hold her accountable for any mistakes, and to set strong boundaries for themselves. The handbook that Esalen hands out nowadays to its "seminarians", as it calls them, starts with a page about consent, in typical human-potential lingo: "Consent is freeing everyone to fully participate in this life we live together."

Wellington pyschotherapist Rachel Davies says her time at Esalen taught her techniques that were not then available in Aotearoa. Davies lived in at Esalen from 2010 to 2013 and has many happy memories of her time there.

"I was worried at first it would be a bit of a 'Gestalt cult', but the place wasn't kooky, just cutting edge. I worked in the kitchen and made everyone pavlovas, and I did workshops all the time. I laughed and cried and never wanted to leave.

"When the [staff] protest in 2012 happened, I stood outside in the circle every day. I learned so many modalities there, like NVC (non-violent communication), meditation, mindful self-compassion and hypnotherapy.

"The community lived by the values it taught — that you speak from your own experience and don't take things out on others. I got to bring all these treasures back and use what I learned every day in my work as a bioenergetic psychotherapist-in-training. Alexander Lowen, who created bioenergetics, was a big influence at Esalen, and so was the bold and innovative work of Wilhelm Reich. There was nowhere I could have done that in New Zealand at the time. It felt revolutionary."

Davies has maintained Esalen connections: she will bring Esalen writing teacher and performer Ann Randolph to New Zealand for two retreats from late January.

Apart from frank conversations in the hot tub that span from microdosing to past lives, the highlight of my week is the 5Rhythms dance. The two-hour long experience — ecstatic, sweaty, exhilarating — is led in a packed dome by a rockstar teacher, expat Kiwi Douglas Drummond. The gentle giant in a black t-shirt that says "Boys should cry" is the director for healing arts. After an international career in hospitality, he married the daughter of Esalen's massage matriarch Peggy Horan and moved to Big Sur for his dream job.

The 41-year-old, of Ngāi Tahu descent, represents a new generation that isn't isolated in a magical time bubble. Over lunch the next day, Drummond admits that the halcyon days of the past were "probably inappropriate and out of line, especially the patriarchal ways men treated women". Esalen being so far away from everything has added to its magic, he says, and while it's still on many Americans' bucket lists, it's also insulated and needed to become more culturally diverse to stay relevant. "I think you can cherry-pick the best of the past while also adjusting to the realities of today."

His current focus has been on reconciliation work with the Esselen tribe of Monterey: spending time with them and inviting them to co-facilitate workshops where he integrates 5Rhythms with their own traditions. "Esalen has had to really take notice of its appropriation of its namesake," he says. "We're sitting on some of the most sacred tribal lands in central California, so there is a reverence on a spiritual level for me." Supporting the Indigenous people and funnelling "conscious investments" their way is what he's most passionate about, besides raising his family and spending time exploring the coastal wilderness. "This is an exciting moment in Esalen's history."

Drummond points at the guests who are eating outside, deep in conversations, some reading books. Given the amount some are willing to spend for this experience, he says, resources could flow back to the tribe. "I'm more interested in exploring that than just risking the further perpetuation of white wellness culture."

The overpriced massage I turned down upon check-in seems more justified now — and more desirable by the minute after watching the shiny happy people who traipse back from their sessions, oily and glowing. Or is it just the hype that this place creates, which lifts every pleasant experience to a "transformation"? I will never find out. The last massage slot for the week is long gone. ■

Lyttelton-based writer **Anke Richter** is the author of *Cult Trip: Inside the World of Coercion and Control* (HarperCollins, 2022). She has written extensively on Centrepoint for *North & South*.

MY SPACE

The word "sanctuary" calls forth a peaceful interior space, and quiet solitude. Instead of pure white rooms broken with shafts of light, Andy Spain's photographs gathered under the title of "Sanctuary" present spaces from the rocky cliffs of Wellington's south coast to an old classroom turned into an art-filled home, to an artist's studio with heavy bull kelp hanging from hooks in the ceiling. Rather than blank canvases, these spaces are portraits — in each there is a person, looking away from our gaze.

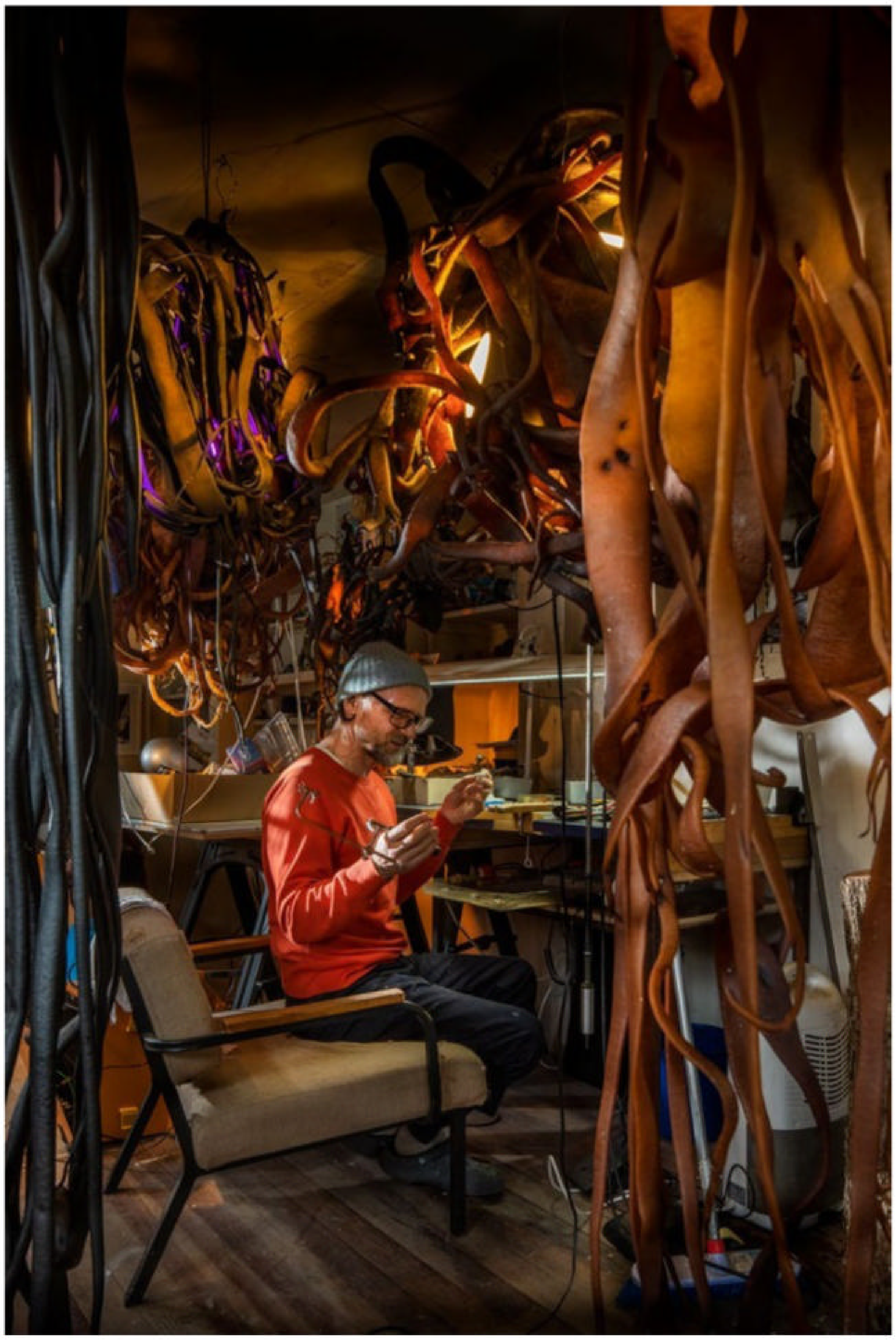
"I was thinking about why, from the age of 12, I've been drawn to photography," says Spain, who has worked as a professional photographer for almost two decades. Recently, he began to unravel the reasons he is so drawn to this artistic expression. When he put aside works created for clients, to appeal to galleries or to please others, what was left was the comfort that photography gives him. "There was this idea of it being some kind of place, a way of finding home, and it extended out into the word sanctuary," he says. Three years ago, he began to ask others, "Where is your place of sanctuary?"

Wellington-based Spain spends time with his subjects in their sanctuaries before the camera comes out. For him, the photographs are more than an image. "They've become quite personal," he says. "Being able to capture someone in their place was important to me." They are a documentation of the privilege of being

let into someone's life, vulnerability, a connection. The portraits capture not only the people in front of the lens, but also the one behind. Spain's own sanctuary is here too: connecting with others through paying attention and taking care in the best way he knows how — through photography.

Sanctuary is now showing at Photospace Gallery, 37 Courtenay Pl, Wellington, 3–26 February. ■

Opposite: Paul, at Rita's restaurant. Above: Fiona, an ultra-marathon runner at Devil's Gate near Red Rocks on Wellington's south coast.



Above left: Karl, an artist, in his studio space in Island Bay, where he was making seaweed sculptures when Spain visited. Above right: Jose, an underwater photographer, at work in his special studio pool in Nelson.

Left: Shonal, in an old classroom at Wellington High School which she has furnished with her belongings.
Above: Mark, an opera singer, musician and conductor, at Scots College, Wellington, where he teaches music.

18+

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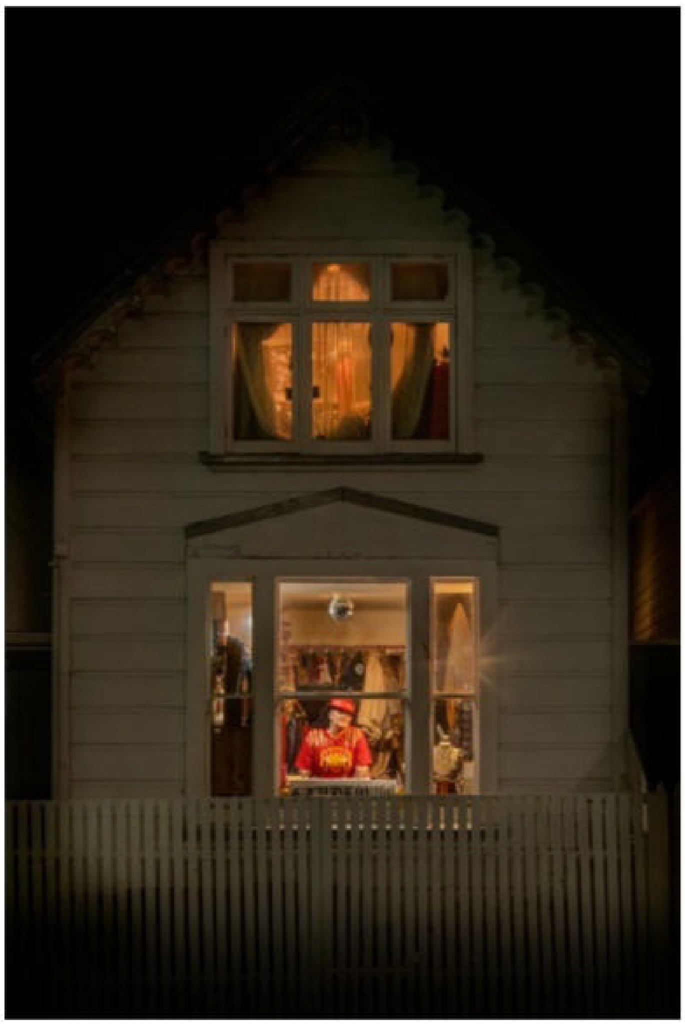

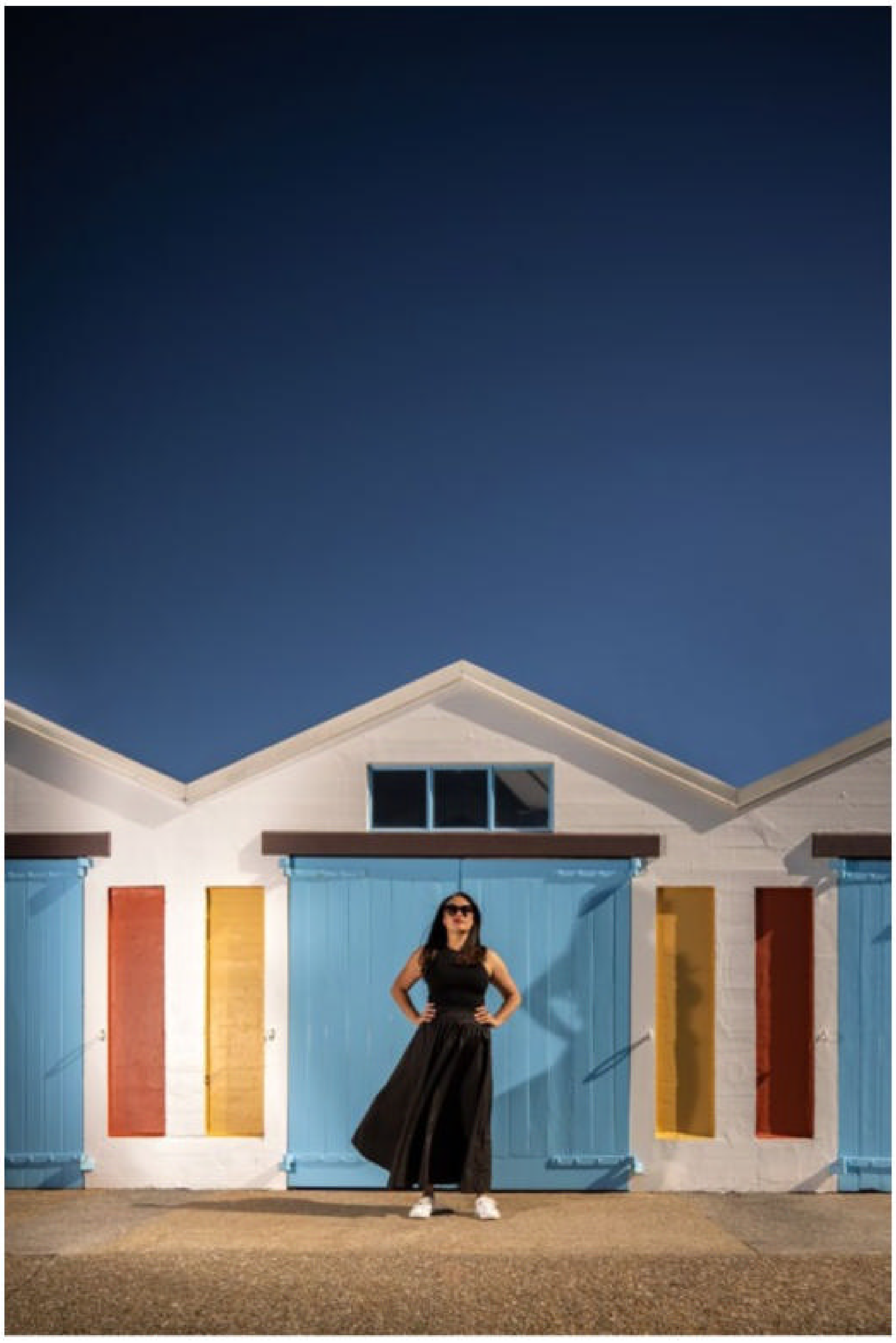

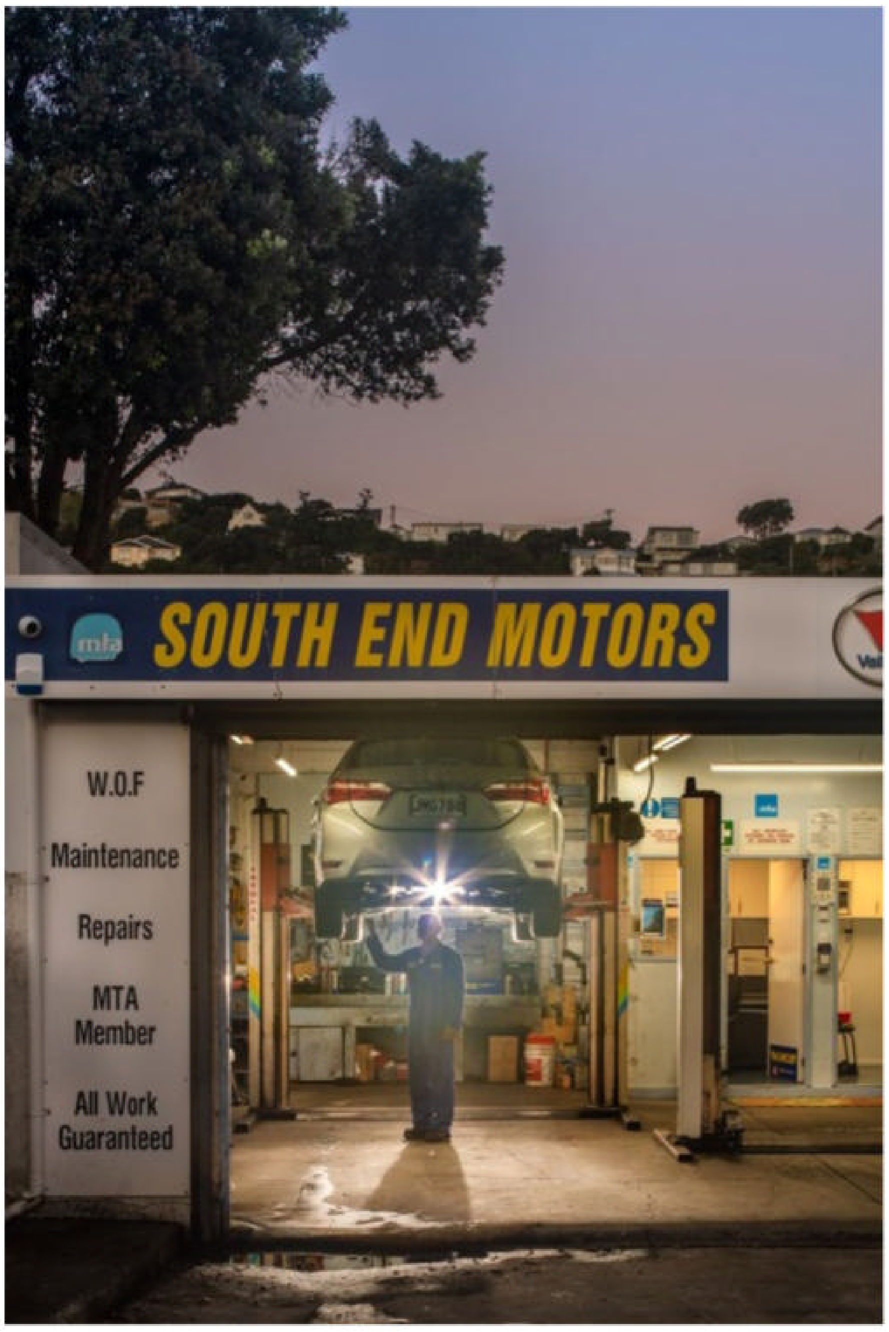
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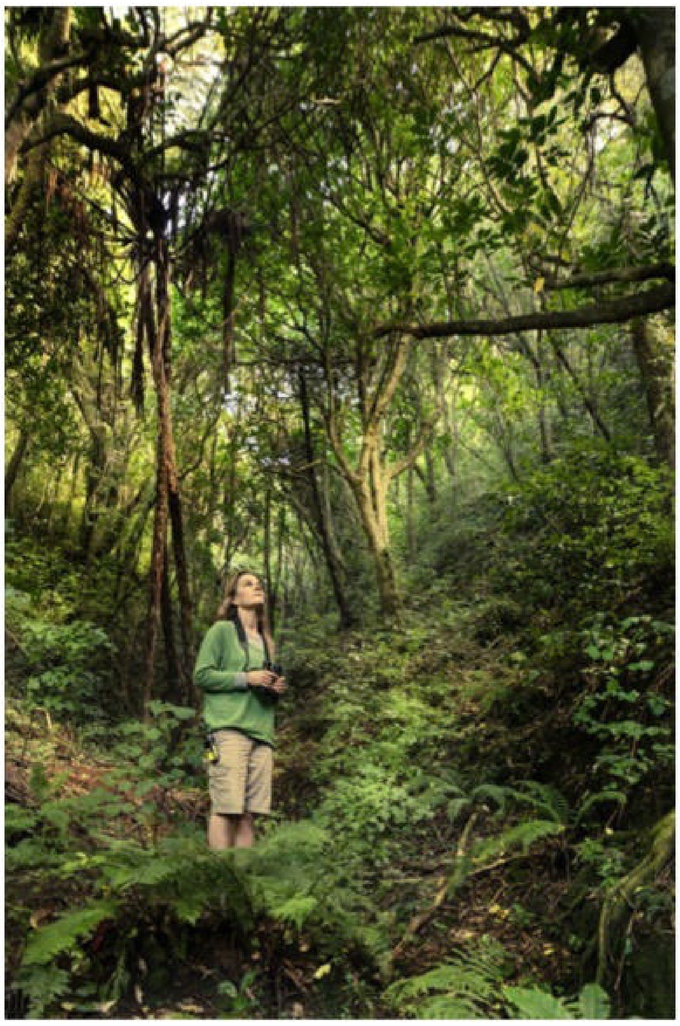
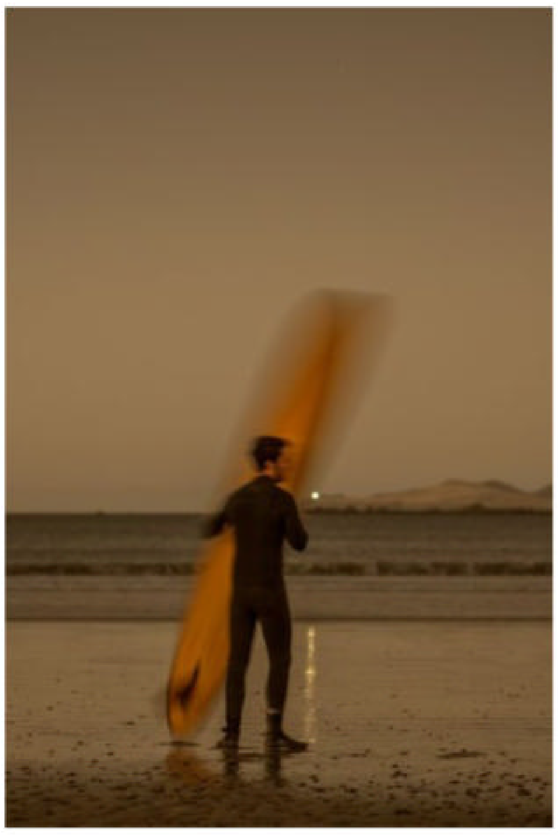
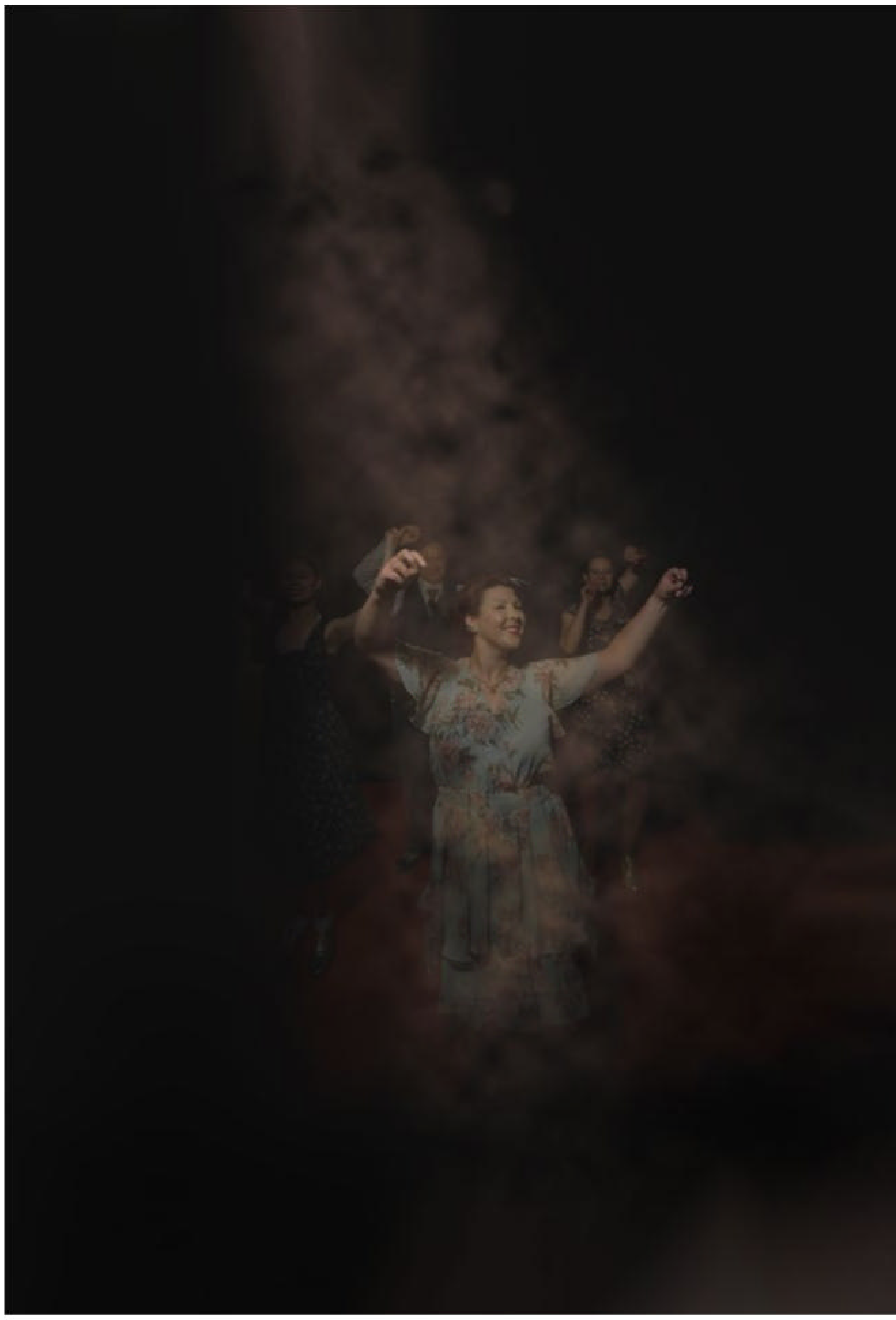
Above: Wellington Mayor Tory Whanau at the boat sheds in Wellington's Oriental Bay. Top right: Pacific Sisters Artist Suzanne Tamaki in her home studio / art space in Wellington. Right: Provin, during his last week at the garage he ran in Wellington for 45 years.







Top left: Conservationist ecologist Kari at Zealandia. Top right: James, a photographer, gallery owner and educator, playing drums in his basement. Above: Jack, at Lyall Bay, near his workshop where he makes eco surfboards. Right: Amy, a teacher, who dances the Lindy Hop.

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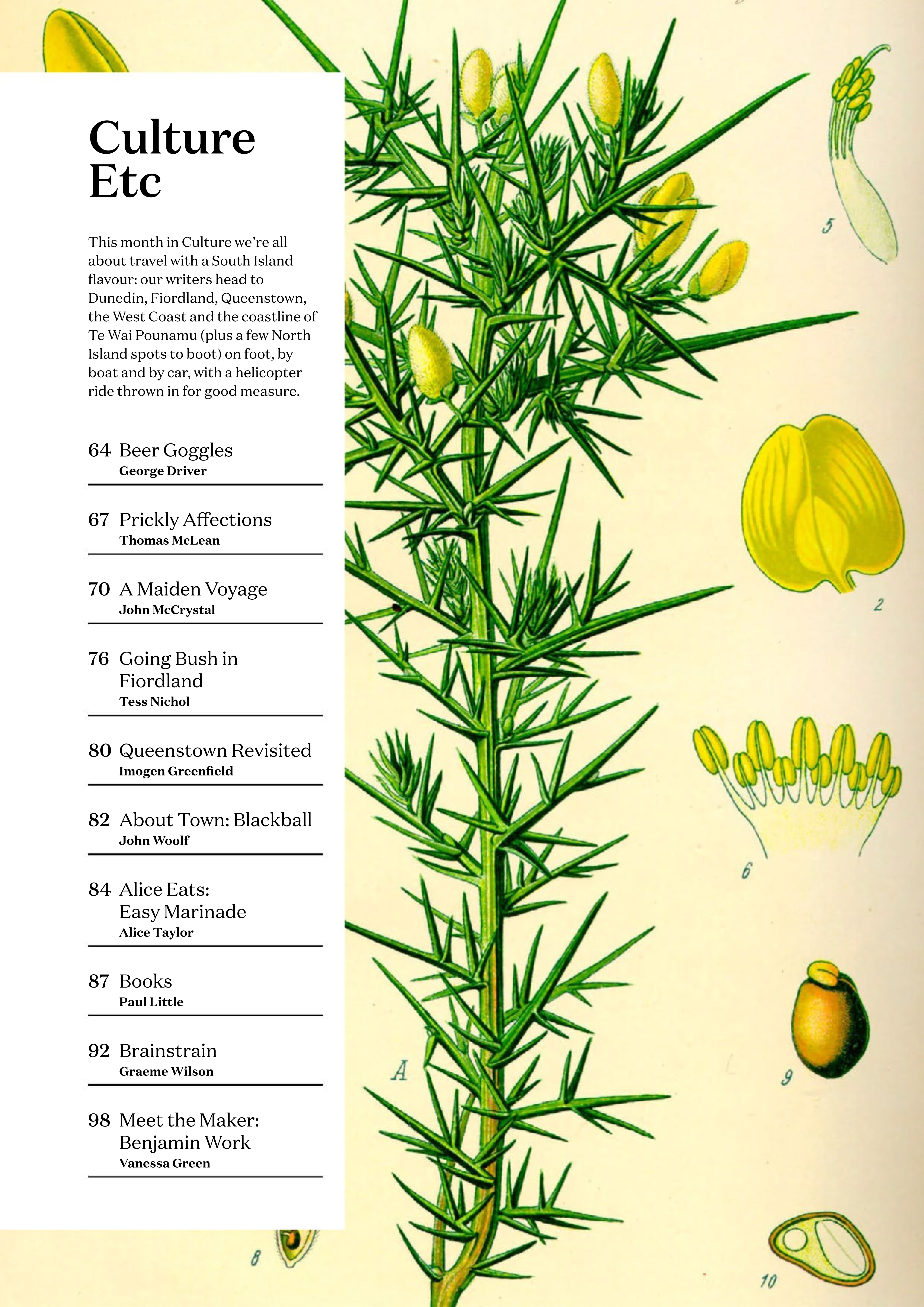

Culture Etc

This month in Culture we're all about travel with a South Island flavour: our writers head to Dunedin, Fiordland, Queenstown, the West Coast and the coastline of Te Wai Pounamu (plus a few North Island spots to boot) on foot, by boat and by car, with a helicopter ride thrown in for good measure.

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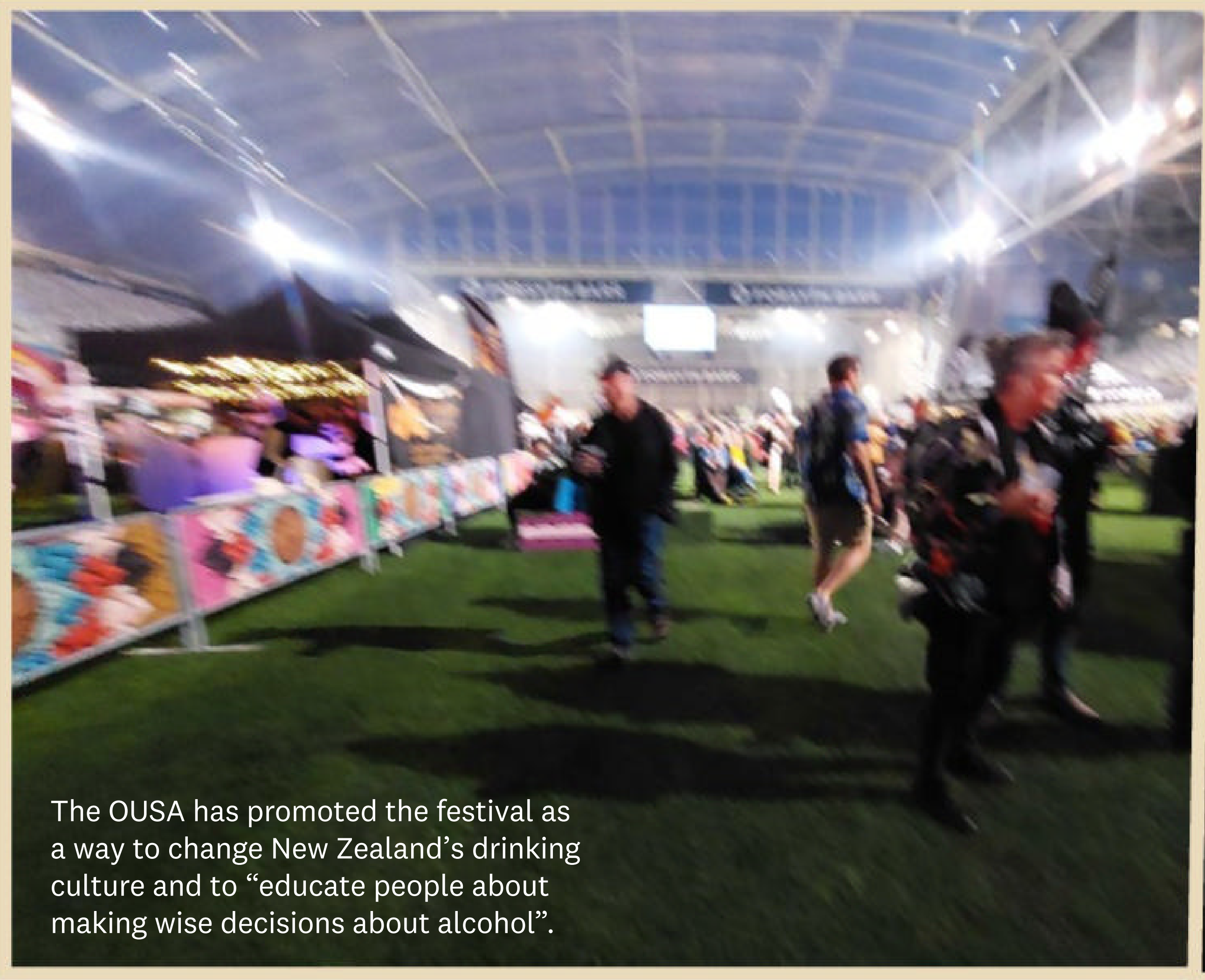
Beer and Loathing in Dunedin

A former scarfie reacquaints himself with Ōtepoti's drinking scene and descends into an existential crisis.

Story and tipsy photographs by George Driver



The OUSA has promoted the festival as a way to change New Zealand's drinking culture and to "educate people about making wise decisions about alcohol".

Looking out over Dunedin's Forsyth Barr Stadium, as a crowd of inebriated southerners rowdily sang in unison "Why does love do this to me?" I was asking myself a different question: Why am I here?

As a relatively new father spending his first night away from his family alone and tipsy at the Dunedin Craft Beer & Food Festival, the answer wasn't obvious. Everyone else was here to have a good time with friends, a goal at which they appeared to be succeeding. As a journalist, I was here to work, to find an angle, to find answers. I just didn't know what the question was. It's by no means a novel conundrum for a journalist. If you went back 2000 years to a gladiatorial duel at the Colosseum, I'm sure you'd find a scribe sitting at the back wondering how to spin something profound out of what he was seeing. At least the scribe had a fight to the death to work with. I just had beer.

Fortunately, I like beer, and the Dunedin Craft Beer & Food Festival is one of the biggest booze-ups in the deep south. The event has clocked up 10 years, and annually attracts about 12,000 punters over two days, and dozens of breweries from around the country.

The festival is run by the Otago University Students' Association (OUSA) which, on reading the ticket price, was a fact I greeted with some scepticism. It costs $50 to enter and another $8 or so for a beer. Attending a tasting session costs $20. Students get a $5 discount, but when I was a student at Otago 15 years ago, we'd usually only be able to afford a $6 six pack of Southern Draught and a night out consisted of $5 jugs and $3 doubles. My first question: How can students afford to be here?

OUSA events manager Jason Schroder has been running the festival for the last five years. When I spoke to him before the festival, he explained that it's not really for first-year students. The festival was actually started because of former Act MP Heather Roy. In 2011, Roy's Education (Freedom of Association) Amendment Bill became law, ending compulsory student union membership and threatening the future of student services around the country as membership levies dried up. In response, the OUSA started looking for a money maker. The concept of starting a beer festival came from an Otago Master of Marketing thesis. Schroder concedes the event is beyond the budget of most undergrad students, but says it's a boon for the student body. "The main reason was to create a long-term sustainable income stream that would be able to finance the majority of our other student endeavours," he says. "That was more important to us than putting on something that students can attend."

The association also hoped putting on an event for the city at large would help ease tensions between students and the city's permanent residents. During my time at Otago, student riots related to annual events like the Undie 500 rally race and the Hyde Street Party were frequently in the headlines. To smooth things over, OUSA decided to invite the city at large over to North Dunedin for a beer or two. Now, it is the city's drinking over two days that helps fund the student association's worthy services.

It's been an enormously successful endeavour. The first event attracted around 3500 people and was held on a small concrete slab in one section of Forsyth Barr Stadium. It's now grown to fill the entire pitch, and tickets usually sell out within minutes. The festival now has spinoffs in Hawke's Bay and Auckland, also bringing in revenue for the association.

I was eager to discover how Dunedin's beer scene had changed

The 30 years of Emerson's tasting included ales that *North & South* Island correspondent George Driver considered to be among the finest on Earth, but were ultimately his undoing.

since my six-year tenure in the city. Back then, the main local beer we'd drink was from a brewery called McDuffs on Great King Street. It was originally called Duffs Brewery, named after founder Gavin Duff, but *The Simpsons* featured a fictional beer of the same name and it had to be renamed after pressure fromTwentieth Century Fox. The beer wasn't particularly good, but it was cheap. Their $150 kegs fueled many a house party in North Dunedin.

My festival began with the perfect reintroduction — a "Taste of Dunedin" tasting session, with eight beers from four local breweries, held in a corporate function room in the bowels of the stadium. I discovered the city's beer scene had transformed for the better. The beers were as eclectic as their brewers — who included a former banker, a baker and a builder — with styles ranging from hazy sour pale ales to a coconut-infused desert stout.

Outside, the festival was already in full swing. I had been sceptical of the ambience created by 12,000 people drinking in a sports stadium, but with an enclosed roof offering shelter from the gale outside, it was the warmest place in the city. People were playing table tennis, drinking in inflatable life rafts and slumped on old furniture arranged to look like a student flat. At one end of the field, people sang karaoke to the Spice Girls. At the other, bands from around the country played throughout the night. There was also a lot of lederhosen. No one mentioned the C-word — Covid-19.

> **My next memory is of slipping into a monologue about myself, talking to a journalist who I had just met. He soon made his excuses, never to be seen again.**

Circling the beer stands, I soon became paralysed by choice. While a decade ago it was difficult to walk into an Otago bar and get served anything other than Speights, now I find the typical tap selection to be overwhelming. Here, at the festival, roughly 400 beers were available.

My strategy to navigate this sea of choice was to focus on the breweries' Belgian-style beers. For the last decade, many New Zealand craft breweries have been in pursuit of hoppiness, competing to reach numbing levels of bitterness. I was party to this pursuit at first and believed the hoppier the better, but after moving to Belgium for a year, I converted to their centuries-old approach.

In Belgium, hops are used sparingly and take a back seat to yeast, which provides most of the flavours. Their beers are often brewed at high temperatures in open vats to stress the yeast and even encourage bacterial infections to provide sourness, the kind of conditions most brewers assiduously avoid. Adjuncts like orange peel and coriander seeds are also added and the beers are often barrel-aged. In general, they're eye-wateringly strong, regularly exceeding eight per cent alcohol by volume. But it all creates an intensity of flavours — citrusy, malty, sweet but balanced — that serves as the perfect antidote to the country's grim winters.

While still rare in New Zealand, Belgian styles are becoming more common among craft breweries and I seek them out where I can. Craftwork in Oamaru is entirely dedicated to Belgian brews, and the founders actually run beer tours to Belgium. Their tasting room in Oamaru's Victorian precinct is like stepping into a traditional Belgian beer bar, complete with chequered floors and stained-wood panelling. My first call for the day was their saison — a traditional farmhouse style that's spicy yet refreshing. This was followed by a tart and crisp Flemish red ale dubbed Erik the Red from Dunedin's newest nano brewery, Dogstar Brew Lab. But I was soon in for my greatest Belgian beer experience outside of Flanders.

I returned to the sterile corporate cavern of the tasting lounge for a session led by Richard Emerson, the man who has done more for Dunedin's beer than anyone else, James Speight included. In 1992, after travelling overseas and discovering that beer didn't have to be bland bubbly brown ales, Emerson returned to the city and started Emerson's Brewery. He aimed to replicate the styles he found in Europe and to convince Dunedin drinkers that there was more to beer than Speights. He took the hard route.

Emerson's first commercial brew was a porter, served warm and flat from bespoke wooden barrels and poured from a hand-pump. Emerson's pilsner later spawned an international style of its own, the now ubiquitous New Zealand pilsner — a clean pilsner showcasing Nelson's fruity hops abundance. While the brewery is now renowned for hoppy beers, Richard Emerson explained that his favourite brews were the yeasty beers of Belgium. Since 2007, Emerson's (now owned by Lion) has released a Belgian-style ale, the JP, commemorating Belgian brewing scientist Jean-Pierre Dufour, who worked at the University of Otago and helped the brewery in its early years. Dufour died in 2007 and Emerson's has released a Belgian-style JP on his birthday ever since.

The tasting focused on aged beers from 30 years of Emerson's, including two delicious spiced ales and an oyster stout. But the main event for me were two Belgian-styles. The first was the latest JP brew, a Belgian quad — a dark beer that has roughly four times the malt of a regular ale and weighs in at about 10.5 per cent ABV — which was extraordinary, tart and fruity. The second was Emerson's Deafinition (Richard's deaf) barley wine. Made in a 200-litre batch and served in a 750ml champagne bottle with a cork, Emerson said the 10.5 per cent ale was his favourite Emerson's beer. I visited half a dozen Belgian breweries during my time in Europe, and these two beers were among the best I've tried.

I was in the dimly lit function room for over an hour, working my way through the selection. While the tasting samples seemed unassuming, I later calculated that their high octane was probably the equivalent to drinking four or five glasses of wine (was I meant to swizzle and spit?). My next memory is of slipping into a monologue about myself, talking at a journalist from another New Zealand publication who I had just met. He soon made his excuses, never to be seen again.

Back outside, the atmosphere had changed, taking on a rabid energy. The Jordan Luck Band began running through their hits on the main stage and shouting was now the favoured form of communication, creating a deafening buzz. The booze then began to nibble into my journalistic confidence. What was I meant to be doing and why was I here? It seemed like I'd just been drinking beer, but this was meant to be work.

By this time, the winners and losers of the festival were beginning to emerge. It was like capitalism at its most brutal and personal — or so I wrote on my phone at the time in a state of booze-fueled hyperbole. It seemed not everyone was as enamoured with the Belgian brews on offer. Craftwork Brewery was already starting to pack up when I sidled over. "Everyone just wants hazies," the stallholder sighed.

Curiously, the once-popular pioneer craft breweries from Auckland and Wellington were likewise deserted. But the Dunedin breweries seemed to have a queue the entire night. I managed to corner Jono Walker from the excellent Arc Brewery based in Blueskin Bay, north of the city (and who I went to school with, incidentally). However, I managed to immediately delete the recording of our 10-minute conversation and the interview is now lost to history. It was clearly time for this tipsy hack to head to bed.

All of the stalls were by then closing in any case. I stationed myself near the exit, watching those even worse for wear disgorge from the stadium. Other than one woman vomiting into her festival glass, it was a slow but well-behaved exit. On the walk back to my Great King St hotel, I went through the deserted university and past the empty student pubs of my youth. Sal's Pizza, in the former Cook tavern, was however filled with middle-aged festival punters like myself, soaking up the beer before concluding a rare night out and going home to relieve the babysitter, or so I surmised.

I retreated to my hotel room to watch pay TV until midnight, basking in the final minutes of life on the road without the family. I awoke alone and bleary eyed, my voice an octave lower. I had not slept well. I made one last stop on the way out of town to buy a bottle of Emerson's JP, before heading back home to my family in Clyde. ■

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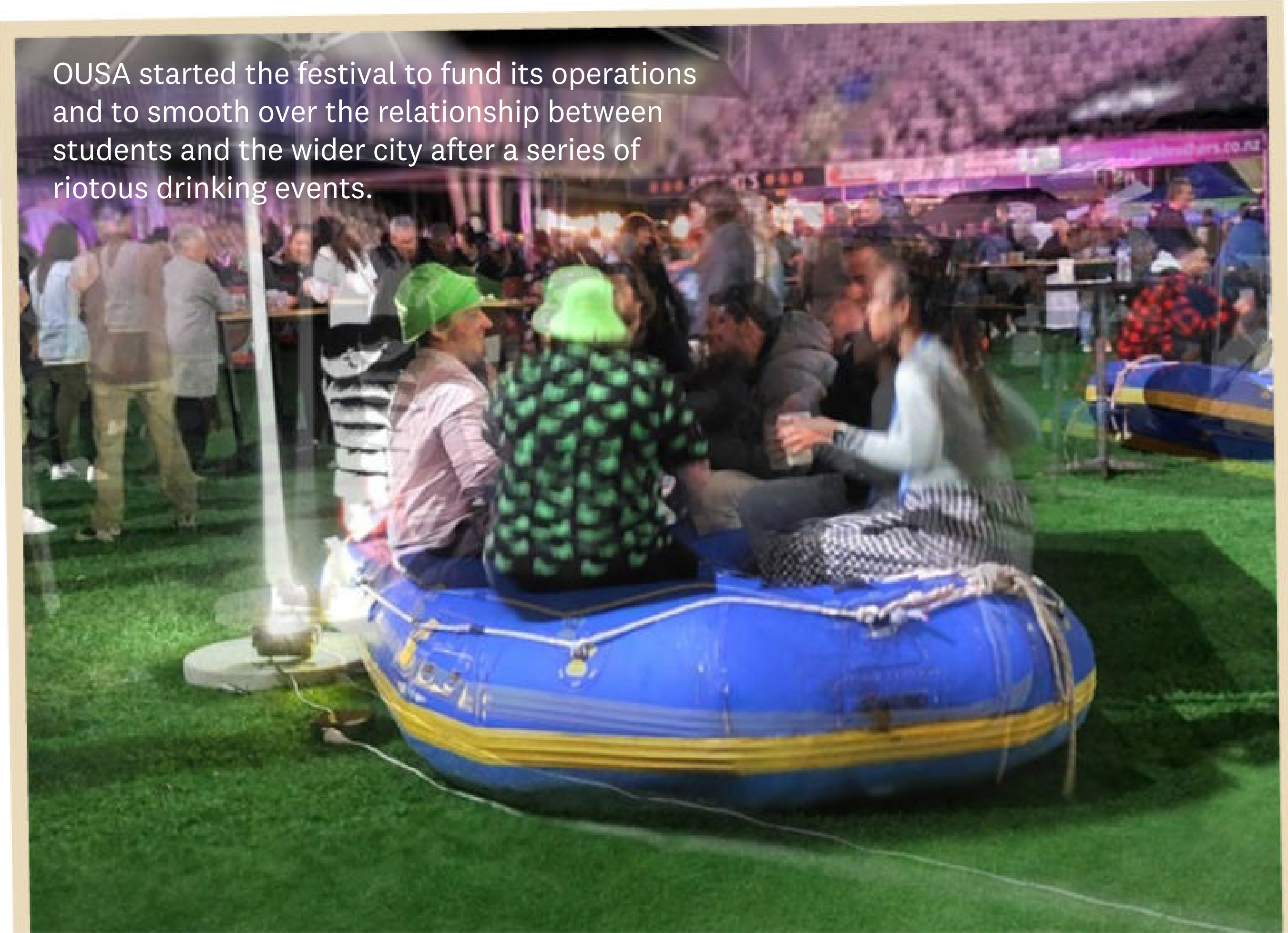
George Driver is *North & South*'s South Island correspondent, a role made possible by New Zealand On Air's Public Interest Journalism funding. He was a guest of OUSA.



OUSA started the festival to fund its operations and to smooth over the relationship between students and the wider city after a series of riotous drinking events.

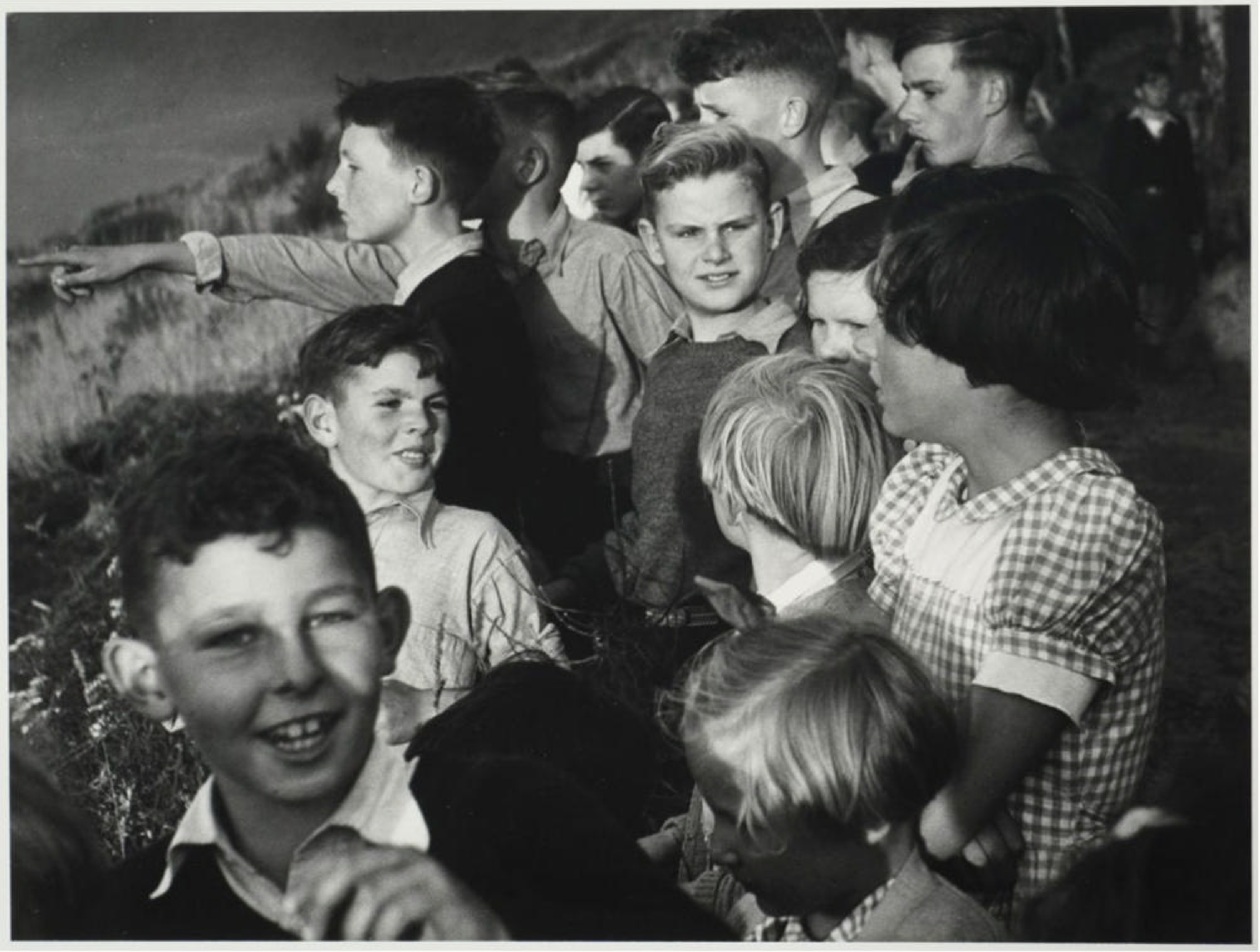


PHOTO GARY BLACKMAN, *CHILDREN WATCHING A GORSE FIRE, MT MERA, DUNEDIN*, 1952, AUCKLAND ART GALLERY TOI O TĀMAKI, PURCHASED 1981

GORSE! WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

From Chaucer's time to our own, artists and writers have been enraptured and enraged by the spiky shrub.

By Thomas McLean

There's a 1952 photograph by Gary Blackman that always gets me. *Children Watching a Gorse Fire, Mt Mera, Dunedin* shows a scrum of school kids in Dunedin's North East Valley. I love the variety of expressions and the way Blackman captures the chaos and curiosity of youth. The cause of their glee and concern — a hillside fire — is beyond the picture frame, only present in the title. It's an image that has stayed with me, and I often return to it in my writing (Blackman died in November last year, aged 92).

I first saw the photograph in 2004, on my first visit to New Zealand from southern California. Back then, there was only one thing about the photo I didn't understand: What was gorse? Eighteen years later and now a New Zealand citizen, I understand why someone might watch with glee as a field of it burns.

New Zealanders hate gorse. It's the farmer's curse and the gardener's nightmare. It looks pretty from a distance and smells buttery nice, but its monstrous thorns tear clothes and skin, and it's almost impossible to eradicate. In the summer heat, gorse pods turn black and explode, firing seeds everywhere, which ensures ongoing environmental battles.

In some pockets of Aotearoa, communities are making a concerted effort to bring the spiky shrub under control. Over the past two years, volunteers have gathered in the West Coast village of Ōkārito to share a week cutting back the rampant gorse that is damaging surrounding wetlands. Armed with saws and herbicide, these so-called Gorse Busters have cleared 30 kilometres of shoreline of the thorny invader, making room for native birds to nest and flora to regenerate.

But New Zealanders didn't always hate gorse. Pākehā farmers once welcomed it, and poets sang its praises. Its tenacity was appreciated, and it quickly became a familiar and admired element of the environment. In poetry, its spread across the landscape was closely associated with the spread of European culture — and the supposed demise of both Māori and of native flora and fauna. In recent years, as the impact of gorse on the environment has been better understood, poets and artists have captured our complex relationship with the farmer's curse — one that shows no signs of ending.

—

Wordsmiths have been remarking on gorse since at least the time of the English poet Geoffrey Chaucer. Versions of a well-known saying "When the gorse is out of bloom, kissing's out of fashion" can be found in Middle English, the medieval aphorism reflecting gorse's long flowering periods along with the fact that several varieties bloom at different times in Britain. But the expression has taken on a new meaning in New Zealand, where *Ulex europaeus* often blooms twice per year.

Gorse appears frequently in English-language poetry, sometimes by its Scots name, “whin”, more often in the word favoured in the 19th century, “furze”. In Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s conversation poem, “Fears in Solitude”, the narrator is brought back from his hillside meditations by the “fruit-like perfume of the golden furze”. But while some writers celebrated gorse’s scent and colour, others highlighted its harsher side. In Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, the troubled anti-hero Heathcliff is described as “an arid wilderness of furze and whinstone”. Perhaps the most famous description of the spiky shrub occurs in Thomas Hardy’s *Return of the Native*, where the resilient locals work in a “heathy, furzy, briary wilderness”, cutting and collecting gorse branches for fire fuel. Less seriously, but no less painfully, Winnie-the-Pooh’s very first adventure involves a fall from a honey-laden tree into a gorse bush.

The earliest reference to gorse in New Zealand appears in Charles Darwin’s *Voyage of the Beagle*: in 1835, he recorded seeing “gorse for fences” at the Waimate Mission station in the Bay of Islands. Its use as a fence or windbreak soon received legislative support, and colonial newspapers advertised the sale of gorse plants and seeds.

In his 1884 poem, “The Canterbury Pilgrims”, Thomas Bracken (composer of “God Defend New Zealand”) celebrated the settlers who transformed the South Island landscape in just 30 years:

> *Behold their work! Revere their names!*
> *Green pictures set in golden frames,*
> *Around the City of the Stream,*
> *Fulfil the Pilgrim’s brightest dream;*
> *With them a fairer England grew*
> *‘Neath speckless skies of sunny blue.*

Bracken’s “golden frames” were the gorse hedges that would neatly surround each green Canterbury canvas. But it was already apparent that gorse was far from picture perfect. Indeed, the novelist Anthony Trollope commented during his 1870 visit to Christchurch that the thorny shrub “has taken so kindly to its new home that it bids fair to become a monstrous pest. It spreads itself wide over the land and lanes, and unless periodically clipped claims the soil as its own.”

For some, the spread of gorse came to represent the spread of European “civilisation” across Aotearoa. In his 1901 sonnet “In Maui’s Island”, Scottish import John Liddell Kelly lamented the changing landscape:

> *And yet I note, with lurking discontent,*
> *The dark bush dwindles, golden gorse spreads free;*
> *So is the vigour of the Maori spent,*
> *So thrives the fair-haired race from sea to sea.*
> *May conquering and conquered blood be blent,*
> *And breed new beauty and virility.*

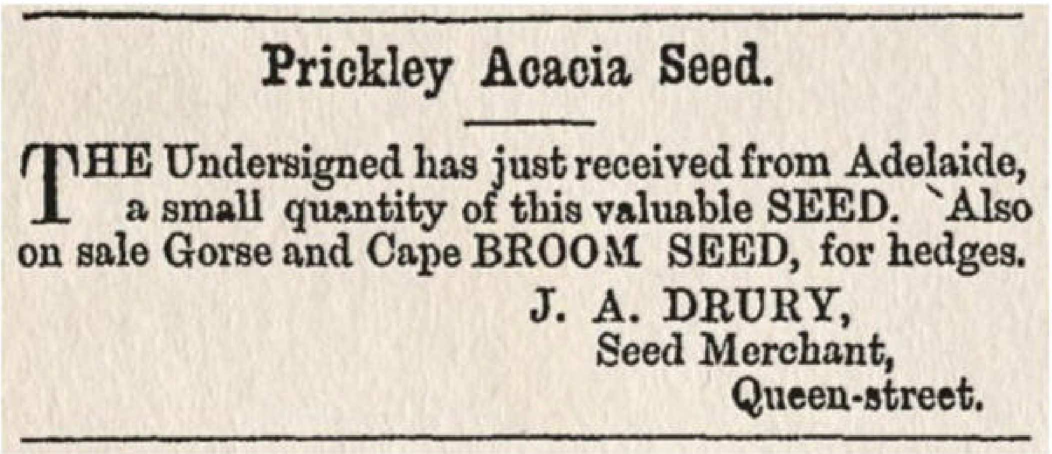
Kelly’s poem echoes popular, false ideas that the disappearance of Indigenous peoples and cultures was inevitable. In his sonnet, the changing colour of the landscape caused by the spread of gorse foretells larger cultural changes. This racist belief was widespread across Aotearoa (as well as the British Empire): think of all those remarkable Charles F Goldie portraits with distressing titles like *A Noble Relic of a Noble Race*.

But such poems were deeply misleading on another level, since they suggested that the spread of gorse (and Pākehā) was easy and inescapable. In fact, as historians like Tom Brooking have shown, it required a complete transformation of the environment. Imagine those early settlers arriving at their plots of (often confiscated) land. First, the trees had to be cut down; the land was burned to clear shrubs and tussocks; wire fences were installed to keep livestock out; European grasses were planted (along with some unwanted weeds, accidentally included in the seed mix); grass seed was threshed for resowing; wheat or turnips and other root vegetables were planted, as food and to break up and enhance the soil; and gorse might replace the wire fences, creating those poetic “golden frames”. And only then, when those cleared and transformed hillsides and landscapes were left untended or abandoned, the gorse broke free.

From one perspective, this transformation of the landscape is an astounding feat, and deserving of Bracken’s wonder. From another, it is appalling. In his early poem “Not by Wind Ravaged”, Hone Tūwhare sums up the transformation.

> *Deep scarred*
> *not by wind ravaged nor rain*
> *nor the brawling stream:*
> *stripped of all save the brief finery*
> *of gorse and broom; and standing*
> *sentinel to your bleak loneliness*
> *the tussock grass—*
> *Oh voiceless land let me echo your desolation. [. . .]*

Of course, in 1901, Tūwhare’s poetic revision of the colonial



Prickley Acacia Seed.

THE Undersigned has just received from Adelaide, a small quantity of this valuable SEED. Also on sale Gorse and Cape BROOM SEED, for hedges.

J. A. DRURY,
Seed Merchant,
Queen-street.

PHOTO THOMAS MCLAEAN; ARTICLE CLIPPING COURTESY NATIONAL LIBRARY OF NEW ZEALAND, PAPERS PAST

Right, gorse blooms along the shore at Ōkārito lagoon. Below, an 1862 advertisement in Auckland's *Daily Southern Cross* offers gorse seeds for sale.

PHOTO THOMAS MCLEAN

enterprise was a long way off. For much of the 20th century, writers simply saw the spreading gorse as a bewitching element of the New Zealand landscape, rather than a marker of past environmental violence. Katherine Mansfield, in her early poem "Vignette — Through the Autumn Afternoon", describes a desire to escape "out of the city streets and on to the gorse golden hills", from whence the whole city and harbour resemble "golden beckoning flowers". As Janet Frame later wrote, "we learned to love those beaches and rivers and the long shadows of a Southland twilight and the golden roads lit on each side by the gorse hedges". Many New Zealanders followed Mansfield and Frame in seeing gorse as a memorable and perhaps even essential element of our landscape.

—

A shift in our thinking about gorse has taken place in the last few decades. It's a plant that needs sun to thrive; if you block the sun, the gorse dies off, and its long-lived seeds have little chance to germinate. Even better, gorse's root systems keep soil in place, and as they break down, they provide nutrients to whatever plant takes hold. This knowledge is of limited use in Ōkārito Lagoon, where the native flora never grow tall enough to shade the invader. But on the east coast of the South Island, at Hinewai Reserve on Banks Peninsula, native trees are very gradually overtaking the gorse that blooms across the hillsides. The transformation back to native growth will take many years, and there's always a danger that fire could set back progress (gorse seeds are famously fire resistant). But eventually, the "gorse golden hills" of Banks Peninsula (and elsewhere) should turn green.

Chris Orsman has written thoughtfully about this shift in perception. In his poem "Ornamental Gorse", the narrator describes the plant as "yellowing our quaint history / of occupation and reprise". "[O]bsequious and buttery", gorse is admirable "from a distance", where its curves and colour among the hills seem to offer "a topiary under heavens / cropped by the south wind". In the poem's final lines, the flowering shrub becomes a religious martyr, "burnt" and "hacked" for our sins, as well as a national symbol: the narrator offers us "this crown of thorns" as New Zealand's "reluctant emblem".

So far as I know, few other poets have engaged with this more complex understanding of gorse. A number of visual artists, however, have done so, often with a hint of humour, suggesting that gorse is neither as wildly romantic nor as harmfully evil as past writers have imagined. The late Peter Nicholls created a series of striking sculptures that combined kauri with gorse as a kind of meditation on the necessity for the native and the exotic to work together. For one work, *Consequential Landscape*, Nicholls filled a beautiful kauri bowl with enormous brown and yellow ceramic gorse seeds.

Regan Gentry's remarkable installation *Gorse, of Course* is a surreal collection of everyday objects — a broom, a bowl, even a mean-looking coat hanger — carved and created by the artist from gorse. Taking its title from a DH Lawrence poem (itself a riff on that medieval aphorism), Madeleine Child's *What if the Gorse Flowers Shrivelled and Kissing Were Lost?* is a messy ceramic creation in white and gold that playfully mocks the farmer's curse. Finally, Laura Marsh's *Home is Where the Gorse Is*, a canvas bed with the title printed across it in black lettering, brings to mind the nostalgia of summer in the South Island with a more sombre echo of the stretchers that carried wounded and dead at Gallipoli.

Marsh's title reverberates in another way. With determination and effort, some invasive species plaguing Aotearoa might well disappear in our lifetimes. Not so gorse which has, in places, made itself a permanent resident. Even in Ōkārito, where everyone seems to support the eradication of gorse from the lagoon, there are no plans to remove a thick inland growth of the spiky shrub that shields the village from flooding. Despite the efforts of Ōkārito's Gorse Busters and the heroes of Hinewai, gorse isn't going anywhere. ■

—

Thomas McLean teaches English at the University of Otago. He has written about gorse, in a more academic vein, for the collection *The Making and Remaking of Australasia* (Bloomsbury, 2022).

Going Coastal

Mixing visits to wildlife sanctuaries with landings in Cook's footsteps, a cruise in New Zealand waters offers another perspective on our natural and human heritage.

By John McCrystal

PHOTO JOHN MCCRYSTAL

Our writer was aboard for the maiden voyage of *Heritage Adventurer*, above, which has replaced the *Spirit of Enderby*, below.

Since I was very young, I've been drawn to arrivals and departures by sea. There's something about those moments — fishing your destination from the water as Maui did; watching it become more substantial as you near, or watching land and certainty recede over the horizon as you leave it behind — that makes me feel connected to my past. After all, for the better part of the history of our nation, it was by sea that we came and went.

The moment of our departure on this voyage is a little lost in the bustle of onboard activity. As the engine note changes and a tug gets busy on our quarter, we're looking for our lifejackets. The lines are cast ashore and a gap between the hull and the dock widens. I glance out my porthole at a channel marker and a sandbank sliding close by as I make my way to the designated muster station, inauspiciously named "Darwin". As we nose through the channel and Mauao — Mount Maunganui — slips by us, we're on deck for a lifeboat drill.

By the time it's finished and we're free to shrug out of our lifejackets and wander about the ship at will, the Mount has dwindled, the water has changed from pastel green to sapphire blue and the vessel is nodding her head to a swell that promises to enliven the evening session for surfers back there at the beach.

The vessel is the *Heritage Adventurer*, known as the MS *Hanseatic* when she was launched in Finland in 1991. She spent most of her early career plying the waters of northern Europe and into the Arctic, with occasional forays south to the Antarctic. She was purpose-built for "expedition cruising" to the rugged regions of the world, and as such, is a perfect fit for Heritage Expeditions, which specialises in offering precisely that kind of experience to the paying public.

Billed as the Coastal Odyssey, this voyage is the first time Heritage has offered this particular route and itinerary. *Adventurer* will take her passengers from Tauranga to Fiordland via Rakiura/Stewart Island before finishing at Bluff, where she will prepare for her Southern Ocean season. She can take 140 passengers in cabins that range from the luxurious Heritage Suite to twin cabins in the lower decks. The complement when we depart Tauranga is a shade over 50: guests will join and depart at various ports, but a handful are aboard for all 14 days of the cruise.

Heritage was formed in 1985 by Rodney Russ and his wife Shirley. Rodney had experienced many of the more remote reaches of New Zealand's territory in his time with the Wildlife Service, and saw an opportunity running commercial trips to the Subantarctic Islands and to the Ross Sea region of Antarctica. The vessel they previously used for these deep-southern ventures was a former Soviet research vessel, the *Professor Khromov* (named after the Russian poet, Valentin Khromov), chartered from her Russian owners and engaged in the local market as the *Spirit of Enderby*. Heritage would typically run two to three month-long trips to the Ross Sea via The Snares and Auckland, Campbell and Macquarie islands while weather and ice conditions permitted.

Then, as the sea ice closed off Antarctica, the *Spirit of Enderby* would head for the Arctic, offering voyages through the Western Pacific and the eastern coast of Asia, as far up as the Kamchatka Peninsula at the entrance to the Bering Sea. She would spend the northern summer exploring destinations such as Wrangel Island and Svalbard, before heading south

again. The period before Christmas would be spent plying south to the Subantarctics and to the Chathams (a favourite trip for birdwatchers), waiting for the Antarctic ice pack to break up again.

Heritage had long ago settled into a comfortable rhythm doing what it was doing — until along came Covid-19. Like most tourism-related ventures and every cruise operator in the world, the company found itself in a two-year, total trading halt. Then, last February, just as things appeared to be opening up again, Russia invaded Ukraine and the charter arrangement with the *Khromov*'s Russian owners fell foul of the sanctions regime.

In circumstances such as these, you can choose either to give up, or to treat the reversal as an opportunity. Heritage chose to build back better. A replacement vessel needed to be found, and as a proven performer in the conditions she would have to face, the *Hanseatic* ticked all of the right boxes. The voyage I have joined is an extension of her maiden voyage as the *Heritage Adventurer*, having been picked up in the middle of last year in Singapore before making her way south, through South-East Asia and Melanesia, to arrive in Tauranga in mid-November.

Whereas the *Khromov* was distinctly utilitarian — she was designed and fitted out with all the flair that the people who designed the Mir space station could have brought to bear — the *Adventurer* is beautifully finished, like a good-quality hotel, with plush carpet, lots of brass and real wood. The décor is tasteful, the cabins roomy and well laid-out, each with their own marble-tiled ensuites featuring an unsettling profusion of mirrors. There is a small swimming pool, a jacuzzi, a steam room, a sauna and even a gym, all on the sunlit upper deck. Soviet-era austerity this is not.

Rodney Russ stepped back from the business shortly before the pandemic, and the operational side of Heritage Expeditions is now in the hands of his sons, Aaron and Nathan. The pair had been aboard on the two trips I took with Heritage into the Southern Ocean around 10 years ago, and Nathan is the "expedition leader" on this cruise.

Whereas Rodney always looked and sounded like a retired military man — ex-Special Forces, or similar — Nathan looks and sounds like a farmer. He's solidly built with fair, wavy hair. As we sip complimentary champagne and he gives his welcome speech, I can't help thinking he'd look more at ease in a Swandri and Red Bands — his delivery makes you feel as though you're with a tour group at a farmstay. But his own sense of anticipation for the voyage ahead is infectious, and around me I hear an approving murmur at his sketch of the road ahead.

> **The food is sensational. I begin to wonder whether the generously proportioned people I have seen waddling ashore from cruise liners actually started out svelte and athletic before all those days at sea.**

The vessel's maiden voyage as the *Heritage Adventurer* has not been uneventful, Nathan hints. Quite apart from the routine shakedown niggles you would expect, it turns out they picked up a drift net with the propellers not long out of Singapore, requiring a tow back to port and rapid repairs to the damaged prop shafts and stern glands so that she could keep up with her full cruising schedule. In light of all this, Nathan looks surprisingly fresh and calm. His voice does take on a certain edge — like a dairyman straying onto the topic of *mycoplasma bovis* — as he talks about "the elephant in the room": Covid, of course. He lays out the letter of the law as it currently stands: anyone testing positive needs to self-isolate in their cabin for five days. Anyone sharing that cabin is free to move about the ship and take full part in activities — the same logic applying to the rest of New Zealand.

Then it's time to introduce the crew. The captain looks dour in a rugged, Nordic kind of way, but it turns out Captain Hans has a fine, dry wit. Like the ship herself, he was "built in Finland", and he does a pretty good double act with his first officer, also Finnish.

Having met the officers, we meet the heads of the hospitality side of things: Adam, the chef; Israel, the maître d'; Sergei, the hotel manager; and Hazel, the spa manager. I'm not kidding about the spa manager: massages are available. The crew, it seems, are a mixture of nationalities and ethnicities. There are Filipinos, Indonesians, a couple of Ukrainians and Russians, along with Hazel, who is from Zimbabwe. For a lot of them, this is their first time in New Zealand waters, and when the ship sails for the high southern latitudes, it will be their first time there, too.

I duck outside before dinner to see what might be seen of the coast. Although the chart plotter displayed on the TV screens in our cabins shows us to be a couple of miles off Matatā, nothing can be seen, as it's raining. A brisk nor-easter is chasing us along. Although there's a swell, the *Adventurer* is proving sea-kindly.

The ship's restaurant is like a high-quality establishment ashore. It has dozens of tables with immaculate white linen. I'm greeted by a smiling Israel and the chair at my chosen table is twitched out by beaming William, who is Filipino. He shakes out my napkin and lays it gently on my lap. A young woman appears holding a bottle of wine in either hand.

"Red, or white wine, sir?" she asks. I ask whether it's possible to

PHOTO COURTESY HERITAGE EXPEDITIONS

have a beer instead, and she looks stricken. Whether this is because she doesn't know the answer, or hasn't understood so many unexpected words in a language that is not her own first language, or I have breached an unwritten rule of high-class hospitality, I can't tell. I point to the red, and her brow clears.

I study the menu. I skip the soup course and the entrée. I'm torn between the oven-baked fillet of sea bream on saffron mash, accompanied by a green pea fricassee and drizzled with mustard and tarragon sauce, or the honey-and-thyme-glazed duck breast on fondant potato with roasted celery and bacon and a port wine demi-glace. I go for the fish.

Besides the featured mains, I note, the kitchen will do grilled fish, chicken or steak on request, along with fries and salad. Glancing ahead at the desserts, my mouth starts watering at the coconut, lime and Malibu syllabub and its worthy rival, the individual apple tarte tatin which comes with cinnamon ice cream and toasted granola.

The fish is sensational. Heritage prides itself on ensuring its guests are supremely well fed, regardless of the conditions under which the food must be prepared and served. During my two previous trips to the Southern Ocean, the top-quality fare only stopped coming when the ship was pitching and rolling in a 10-metre swell, and it was right at the end of the month-long voyage that our fresh vegetables finally gave over to frozen. At first glance, it looks clear that the food on this voyage will exceed even those lofty standards. I begin to wonder whether the generously proportioned people I have seen waddling ashore from cruise liners actually started out svelte and athletic before all those days at sea.

Out my porthole the next morning I can see the sky and sea are both grey, and it is still raining. Nevertheless, I head up to the observation deck to get a glimpse of our next port of call, which is to be at Tūranganui-a-Kiwa, where the *Tākitimu* waka arrived bringing people from Polynesia around 800 years ago and where Captain Cook made his first landfall on Aotearoa/New Zealand in 1769, a couple of weeks shy of 253 years ago.

We are a few miles off Tuaheni Point at the northern end of what Cook misnamed Poverty Bay: to the south, I can see the white bluffs of Te Kuri, Young Nick's Head, a sighting of which won the *Endeavour*'s surgeon's assistant, Nicholas Young, a gallon of rum and a dash of immortality in the form of a placename.

After breakfast (early risers can help themselves from the continental and cereal bars in the bistro, or hang on till 7:30 when a full breakfast is served in the restaurant), we prepare to go ashore. The ship takes on the pilot, and he steers us to an anchorage at the entrance to the narrow, dredged channel leading to the port, where a couple of huge, rusting logships are loading.

The gangway is lowered, and we are helped into Zodiacs, rigid-hulled inflatables powered by 60-horse Yamaha outboards. The *Adventurer* carries 14 of these to cruise coastlines and ferry people ashore at places where there are no developed landing places — such as in the Subantarctic islands or at Gisborne right now, where the port is a construction site, the authorities having decided to build back better after Covid-19, too.

We're told we're expecting to be greeted with a pōwhiri: as the boat lurches up onto the plane and we skip towards shore, the wind ruffling our hair and spray hissing from the bows, a voice, tense, Australian, says: "Well, I'm not rubbing noses with anyone."

ZODIAC DRIVER

Adventurer guests catch a ride ashore to Gisborne for a day of activities.

PHOTO JOHN MCCRYSTAL

The greeting ashore is poignant for two reasons. We are the first cruise ship to visit since the lockdown, so our arrival signals the possibility of the revival of tourism in Tūranganui-a-Kiwa. And we have landed pretty much precisely on the spot where Cook landed, two-and-a-half centuries before. As the young men and women of Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Horouta Wānanga sing their melodious waiata and then finish with a rousing haka, it's hard not to think of Cook and his officers standing on the beach, watching the eyes and teeth and weapons of a hundred toa flashing. You can see how a ritual challenge was tragically misinterpreted, so that blood was shed in the first, inauspicious contact between the peoples who would later sign the Treaty.

Nathan speaks on our behalf. He celebrates the fact that we're the first cruise ship to return to Gisborne. I wonder for a fleeting second whether he's brought along his speech notes from the Melanesian leg of the voyage, because he talks about how

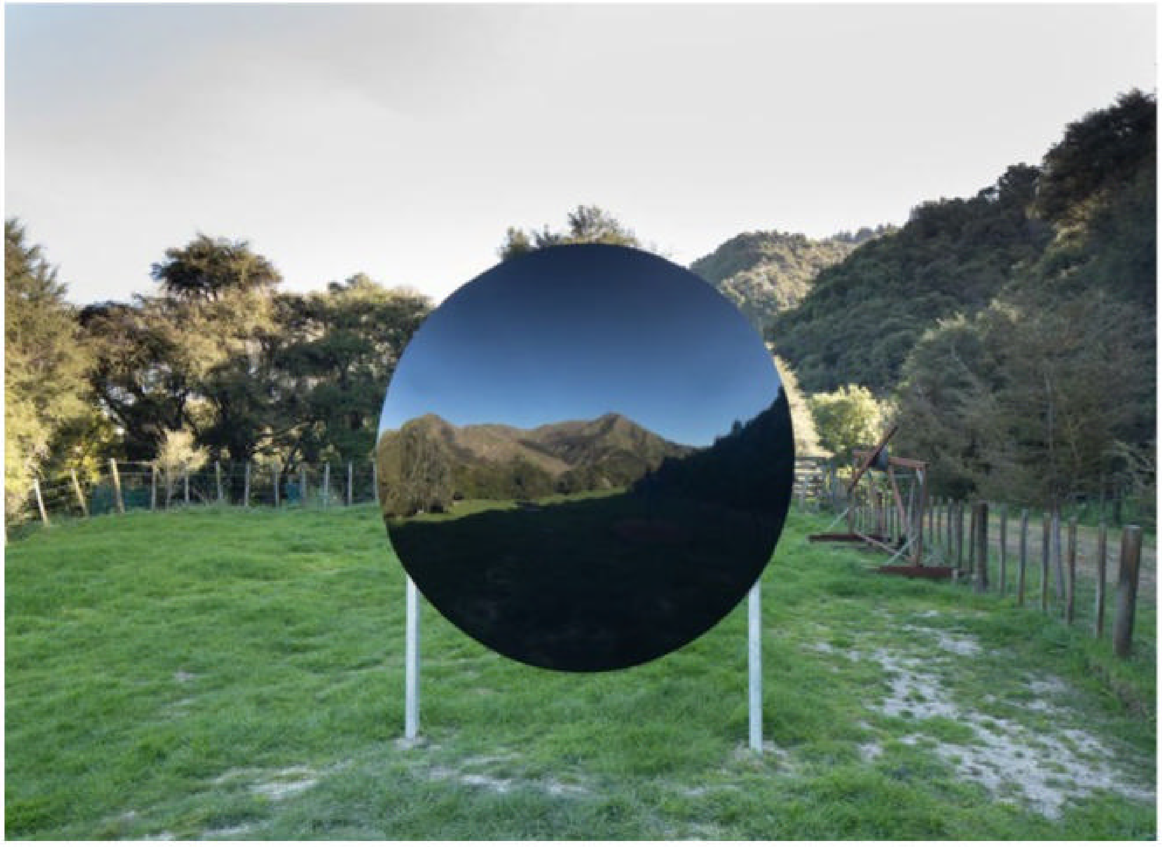


PHOTO COURTESY WAIKERERU ECOSANCTUARY

The reflection of the sacred maunga Motukeo reflected in Claude glass at the Waikereru Ecosanctuary.

beneficial visits from groups such as ours can be for "remote villages" such as the one we're in. His kōrero is well-received, though, by the residents of the remote village of Gisborne. It's not a true pōwhiri, as we're not asked to follow with a waiata or, indeed, to rub noses with anyone. But the spirit of a pōwhiri is there. We feel welcome, and accepted, even on that bloodstained soil.

In his briefing the previous evening, Nathan asked us to choose between two options for our activities: a visit to Eastwoodhill, the national arboretum, or to Waikereru Ecosanctuary. I've chosen Waikereru, 10 kilometres up in the hills behind the town. This, the property of Dame Anne Salmond and her husband Jeremy, was once a farm, but it is now the site of several initiatives to restore native flora and fauna and to interpret them to the general public. We're shown the 1769 Garden, planted to celebrate Cook's visit and the activities of his shipboard botanists, Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander.

The species that have been planted there are representatives of specimens collected back then, and they've been planted in ways that are inspired by the traditional Māori methods also documented by Cook's crew.

We visit a harakeke library, where a huge selection of native flaxes are growing, and wander through Longbush, a rare tract of regenerating lowland bush. Mike, *Heritage Adventurer*'s resident twitcher (birdwatcher), is in hog heaven. But it's the curious object in the paddock adjacent to the harakeke garden that most impresses me. It's a large, black disc, about three metres in diameter, like a convex mirror. This is a scaled-up Claude glass, our guide Malcolm tells us, a device that landscape painters once employed to get a different and wider perspective. The painter would set up the palm-sized glass on their easel and paint what it reflected over their shoulder.

When you stand before Waikereru's Claude glass, what you see reflected is Motukeo, a maunga sacred to Ngāti Porou as the local version of Northland's Cape Reinga, the leaping-off place for the spirits of those departed. This is a fitting way of celebrating Dame Anne's contribution to New Zealand history — looking the opposite way to the mainstream at the time in order to get a different view, namely one that included Māori oral history alongside the Pākehā commentary of events that was previously considered to be our nation's story. It's made all the more poignant when Malcolm tells us that the block of land that includes Motukeo is for sale, and if it can't be bought by a trust dedicated to saving it from that fate, it will likely be planted in pines.

In the evening, back aboard, we hear an excellent lecture from Mike on how the birdlife of Aotearoa came to be so poorly equipped to deal with introduced mammalian predators. After the lecture, the bar opens. I know from my previous trips that I must treat the bar with caution, as the prices are in US dollars and your tab will quickly mount up if you're not careful, but it's pleasant sitting with a beer and watching the scene change outside the windows.

We're underway, heading down the coast towards Hawke's Bay. Nathan and the guides run through a recap of the day's activities, complete with slideshow, and a preview of the next day. Then it's dinner, and a difficult choice between the pan-seared tuna loin steak with Asian sauce on rice noodles, stir-fried pak choi, beansprouts, carrots and peppers, or the duo of pork, featuring slow-roasted loin and crispy belly, scallion mash, glazed carrots and a cider demi-glace. I choose the tuna. It's magnificent.

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In 1769, Cook performed a "running survey" of the New Zealand coastline, standing off the coast far enough to avoid danger, but close enough to make a reasonable chart of its outline. Over the next few days, we perform a running survey of our own, keeping between one and two nautical miles off. The weather is poor, with heavy rain dogging us.

In Cook's footsteps, we visit Napier (where he named Cape Kidnappers) and pass through the strait named after him to Ship Cove, just inside the entrance to Queen Charlotte Sound. From there, we journey down the east coast of the South Island. Cook was blown off Banks Peninsula by a gale and never proved to his own satisfaction that it was part of the mainland; with modern charts and thousands

of mechanical horsepower at our disposal, we're able to approach rather closer despite similar weather and drop anchor in Akaroa Harbour.

The following day, we pass down the long, narrow channel past Port Chalmers into the Port of Dunedin, wreathed (appropriately enough) in Scotch mist. We fall back in with Cook's route after visiting Otago. Cook couldn't get close enough to determine whether Stewart Island was in fact an island, and rounded what he imagined was the South-West Cape of the mainland. We stop at Rakiura/Stewart Island and visit Ulva Island and Half Moon Bay.

> **At first, I was known as "Mr John", but by day three, Andrea, the bar tender and sommelier, had promoted me to 'Sir John', and the name has caught on.**

At each port of call, there are activities. To the frustration of some of the passengers, they don't necessarily correspond in every particular to the plan that Nathan outlines the evening before, but that, he reminds us, is part and parcel of expedition cruising. At Napier, we go on a bus tour that samples the art-deco highlights of the inner city, and then head south to Cape Kidnappers and visit the gannet colony there.

At Ship Cove, we walk a short section of the beautiful Queen Charlotte Walkway, and then visit Motuara, another wildlife sanctuary. While we are anchored at Akaroa, I get to do a walk in the rain on Ōnawe Peninsula, a significant site in the history of this highly historic area. Nathan brings a couple aboard who conduct a tasting of the wines that they produce at their local vineyard, French Peak. From Dunedin, we are driven out to Taiaroa Head to visit the colony of northern royal albatross, and to enjoy lunch at the Portobello pub.

Each of our stops is illuminated by the commentary from our guides, and by their evening lectures: Rod and Lindsay, whose encyclopaedic knowledge of the flora and fauna is matched by their extensive experience in conservation efforts; Mike, our very own petrelhead, on birds; Chris, who possesses an extraordinary knack for delivering potted versions of the complex history of the places we visit; Glenda, who is an expert in the geology, and Matt, who is a veteran yachtie and an authority on oceanography.

One of the major advantages of operating a larger vessel, Nathan tells me, is that whereas their expeditions could previously only afford to take generalists along, who could give once-over-lightly lectures on everything, they now have the room to take specialists. We, the passengers, are the richer for it.

Meanwhile, we live the shipboard life of Riley. When I wander into the restaurant for dinner, I'm greeted like a long-lost friend. The staff all knew our names by day one. At first, I was known as "Mr John", but by day three, Andrea, the bartender and sommelier, had promoted me to "Sir John", and the name has caught on with the other staff. At my regular table, I am waited on by William from the Philippines and by the charming Fatima, from Indonesia, who has worked out that I prefer beer over wine with my meals, regardless of etiquette.

The food remains ridiculously good, the highlight being "BBQ Night", when the plan was to serve us from a buffet set out on the sundeck aft of the bistro. It wasn't barbeque weather — it pissed down — but that didn't detract from the food. A highlight: animals sculpted from fruit and veg that made for the meal's centrepiece.

On the eve of our arrival in Stewart Island, we're issued snazzy gumboots, which are symbolic of the fact that the cruise is about to become much more like the kind of expedition that Heritage specialises in. We're divided into groups to enjoy a tour of Ulva Island, another bird sanctuary: my group's luck is very much in with Emma, our guide, whose family have lived on Stewart Island for generations. Afterwards, some of us choose to do a pretty two-and-a-half hour walk through the bush from Kaipipi, the site of an old whaling station, to the pub in Oban in Half Moon Bay.

PHOTO LEFT JOHN MCCRYSTAL, BELOW COURTESY HERITAGE EXPEDITIONS

We arrive in Thompson Sound on Fiordland's fearsome weather coast in the early hours of the morning of our second-to-last day, chased into the channel by a 65-knot westerly squall carrying hail under its wing. I join a group doing a walk from Grono Bay to the Gut Hut on Secretary Island. Someone suggests the weather is too bad and we should abort: "Not while a Russ is in charge," cries Matt, who is driving the Zodiac. "They'll always find a way."

Ashore, I decide the snazzy gumboots won't be ideal for walking in. I have only a pair of Skechers, bought as new from an op-shop for $8, hardly ideal either for a walk in the wilderness of Fiordland. As I'm putting them on, a bird starts a mocking call: "Sneakers! Sneakers!" Sure enough, one comes off 10 metres into a soggy 70-metre bush-crash we must bash through before joining the rough track, made by pest-control personnel to service their baits and traps. But the shoes hold out, and so does the weather, which commences to lash down as soon as we're back aboard the *Adventurer*.

Opposite, Cape Kidnappers in Napier. Below left, a robin on Ulva Island. A plaque marking Astronomer's Point, above, and a stormy Thompson Sound, below.

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Cook catches up with us again the following day, the last day of the cruise, at Astronomer's Point, where he arrived after weeks battling gales in the Southern Ocean on his second voyage. You can tell the guides are enjoying doing their thing in the Zodiacs — much more exciting than bus trips. Chris takes a roundabout route ashore that brings my group through a narrow channel that Cook had his ship the *Resolution* towed through with rowboats. It dramatically illustrates how small the *Resolution* was.

We make the short walk up to the spot, marked with a bronze plaque, where Cook's astronomers took sights to establish the longitude of New Zealand. You can see the moss-covered stumps of the trees that were felled to give a view of the sky. Nearby, we are shown two stone-lined pits in the peaty soil — probably Māori storage pits dating back to the same time.

It's a reminder of how young our country is, that we can still see the handiwork of those who were alive when our peoples' histories first intertwined. And even in a place remote as this, we're forcibly reminded of the damage that has been done since, to the flora, to the fauna and, by analogy, to the people. There are birds, but far, far fewer than in the sanctuaries that we have visited, thanks to the predation of introduced mammals. As we stand at Astronomer's Point, Rod reminds us that it is likely that it was here, with the *Resolution* tied up to the land itself, that brown rats first made their way ashore.

PHOTOS JOHN MCCRYSTAL

That night, on our final night, Nathan stands up to do his wrap-up of our voyage. At this moment on both my previous Heritage trips, the formidable Rodney Russ had choked up, because it was not just in financial terms that he was so deeply invested in leading expeditions.

The whole concept was born of his passion for the places we visited, and his desire to make each of the visitors he brought there "ambassadors" for them, as determined as him to protect them. Nathan is the same, for the same reasons and also because it hasn't been easy delivering this trip, using a new vessel with a new crew and along an unproven route involving port authorities and tour operators who have all but forgotten how to handle cruise ships. You can see his relief, and his pride, and it's justified.

There are aspects of the itinerary that will naturally evolve over time, but this was a tremendously impressive first outing for the Coastal Odyssey. I look around at the foreigners aboard, and hope that they have enjoyed the trip through my country as much as I have. Because I feel both grateful, and privileged, to have been given the chance to look at the country that I know so well from a different perspective, as if in a Claude glass. ■

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John McCrystal is a Wellington freelance writer. He travelled as a guest of Heritage Expedition Cruises. For more information, visit heritage-expeditions.com

PHOTOS TESS NICHOL

TRUE GRIT

A four-day guided walk in remote Fiordland offers unmatchable scenery, spectacular birdwatching – and a new appreciation of the hardships once endured there.

By Tess Nichol

With a baby on her hip and an axe in her hand, Margaret McKenzie cut her way through kilometres of thick Fiordland bush. The McKenzies had recently arrived at the pioneer settlement of Jamestown in December 1876, on the north side of Lake McKerrow. Once there, they discovered that the settlers who had arrived before them were leaving at an alarming rate.

Promises of great riches — land and gold — had been much oversold to the working-class British immigrants who had hoped to prosper at the settlement. Life in the remote bay, surrounded by dense bush and prone to wet weather, was discovered to be next to impossible. By the late 1870s, only the most hardy or desperate were still hanging on.

The partially abandoned town presented an immediate problem for Margaret: her year-old son, Malcolm, needed milk and Jamestown had none. The family's own small herd of cattle had been left in the neighbouring Big Bay, unable to follow over the boulder beaches or rocky headlands. Margaret knew one cow had recently calved and so, full of pioneering spirit, set off with her husband Daniel to clear a path through the bush in order to bring the herd back.

With Margaret dressed in the full skirts befitting of a lady at the time, the couple walked for miles, cutting a cattle track as they went. The McKenzies were away for three weeks, leaving their other three young children in the care of their new neighbours. When they finally arrived, they discovered the journey had been in vain: the cow Margaret had specially made the trip for was already dry.

As our Hollyford Wilderness Experience guide recounts this tale of hardship in front of a small plaque — the only remaining evidence that the failed settlement of Jamestown ever existed — a fellow tramper shakes his head next to me. "We're all such wusses."

Our group had earlier arrived at Martins Bay by speedboat, coming down the Hollyford River and across Lake McKerrow on a journey which took approximately 12 minutes. Last night, we'd slept on real mattresses underneath plush duvets in the Hollyford Wilderness Experience's newly renovated Pyke Lodge, and I personally had woken up several hours earlier to a spectacular view of Fiordland National Park's Mount Madeline. This followed an evening spent with some lovely pinot noir and a cooked meal, including a perfectly sour slice of lemon tart. A lavishly laid cheese board made an appearance, too. Standing in the rain among the ghosts of Jamestown I wondered if Margaret McKenzie had ever tried salmon pâté.

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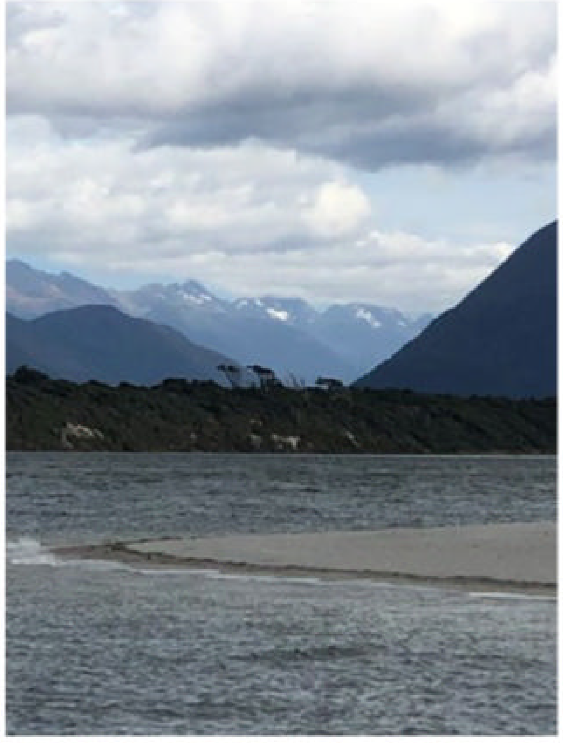
In the four days spent on the Hollyford Wilderness Experience in Fiordland, you will eat roughly every two-and-a-half hours. Bard, our lead guide, tells us this on the first morning, which starts early for a 7.30am departure by van from Te Anau's Distinction Hotel. He tells us a lot of other things in the van as well, mostly about native-plant regeneration, and it's all very

Stunning views to the mountains and the Hollyford River, left, and evidence of the incredible variation in Fiordland's landscape, right.



interesting but the van is quite warm and the rocking of the road quite soothing and I fall asleep for most of the two-hour journey to the start of the Hollyford Valley track, creating a gap in my otherwise perfect record of the trip.

The nap is probably useful. While the Hollyford Valley is one of Aotearoa's flattest multi-day walks, the first day of walking is a long one — 19.5 kilometres, or about 29,000 steps according to my phone's pedometer (FYI, the comparing of Fitbits and step counters will be one of the main topics of conversation each evening of the trip, and a topic I found myself surprisingly invested in).

It was the track's lack of incline which, along with the promise of a super-light pack, a real bed, and a helicopter ride back out to Milford Sound, had initially convinced me that even I — who found the notoriously easy Abel Tasman Great Walk a real slog — could handle it.

Tramping purists might turn their noses up at such an arrangement, but for anyone who loves the bush but simply can't find enjoyment in the practicalities of tramping, it's a perfect compromise. Likewise, for those who have spent a lot of time outdoors but know their stamina isn't quite what it used to be (or is over sleeping on a camping roll), it's an opportunity to keep adventuring well into retirement. The majority of our group were in their 50s and 60s, and a couple were pushing 80.

Despite the luxuries, you still actually do enough walking to feel you've truly earned your glass of red at the end of the day. We keep a nice rambling pace going throughout that long first day, and the weather is perfect: a morning of light drizzle clearing to sunshine in the early afternoon. Is there anything more beautiful than the Fiordland bush after rain? Lush and dense, even the moss clinging to the tree branches glimmers in the sudden beams of dappled light; everything is so vivid and green and alive.

Along the way, Bard points out rare and unusual species, as well as stories of the cultural history of the Hollyford. He has walked the Hollyford some 500 times over his two stints working for Wilderness Experiences, with a break in between running South Island tours for National Geographic Expeditions. The company has been owned since the early 2000s by Ngāi Tahu Tourism, the iwi-owned parent company of several outdoor tourism companies, including Queenstown's Shotover Jet.

Promises of great riches had been much oversold to Jamestown's working-class pioneers, and by the late 1870s, only the most hardy or desperate were still hanging on.

Although ownership by Ngāi Tahu does not necessarily mean direct iwi involvement in its running (the iwi has significant investments in so many companies it's hard to keep track of them all), there is an intention of incorporating a te ao Māori perspective into each Ngāi Tahu Tourism experience. Hollyford Wilderness Experience liaises directly with local rūnanga to seek input on how best to run the tours.

Bard, an apparently indefatigable Pākehā in his mid-40s, points out that the Hollyford lends itself more readily to this than perhaps the Shotover Jet. Bard always wears shorts and he always sets a cracking pace, sharing in his booming voice stories of Māori chiefs; rongoā – the medicinal use of plants; the pounamu trail; Pākehā settlers; land wars; starvation; and cracking tales of adventure (some of them impressively gruesome — it turns out Buck Shelford isn't the only hard-case Kiwi bloke to soldier on with a busted scrotum, and Buck should be thankful he didn't have to sew his back up himself with a piece of fishing line).

It's a tall order to come up with — let alone remember — four days' worth of anecdotes and fauna facts, but Bard's enthusiasm and admiration for both the people and the land of Fiordland means that even though he could probably recite each story or tidbit of information in his sleep, none of it feels rote. Our group is enamoured of him, this rambunctious outdoorsman who's shot his fair share of wild game and loves a cold pint, whose reo pronunciation is perfect and who has growing in his garden daffodils descended from a specimen carefully taken from the remnants of the McKenzie family's homestead garden.

He is helped, certainly, by the remarkable landscape we're traversing. The changeable nature of the bush in Fiordland is like nothing I've seen before. When we head out from Pyke Lodge to Martins Bay on the west coast on day three for our second long walk of the trip (this time with only a day pack on — the boat which jets us up Lake McKerrow also takes the rest of our stuff on to the Martins Bay Lodge), the extent of the landscape's diversity is revealed.

Looking back after coming out by the ocean on the west coast in

The writer admires a thundering waterfall, just off the Hollyford Track. This photo was chosen over others where she is facing the camera, because she looks weird in a beanie.

the early afternoon, we can see the land we've walked through: alpine peaks frame beech forest sitting above podocarp forest full of totora, rimu and kahikatea, which in turn makes way for coastal forest and sand dunes which themselves are constantly changing — floods in February 2020 transformed the topography of the land in more than one part of the walk, including in Martins Bay, where the lower Hollyford River burst its banks to create a new river mouth.

These events were documented by the Hollyford Conservation Trust, who partnered with the Department of Conservation and other stakeholders to rid the lower Hollyford Valley of predators in 2014. Birdlife increases the further you travel from the start of the track — testament to the trust's work. The birds are everywhere: two kākā swoop in the podocarp forest, the sudden flash of orange under their wings a thrill to spot, and a flock of whio bob on the surface of the lake. Bellbirds sing to each other among the beech, banded dotterels scurry through the sand dunes and a white heron watches us pass by as it perches on a riverside branch.

Down by Martins Bay we come across two trust volunteers cutting track and resetting traps — a decomposed rat carcass near the shoreline needs to be removed from the trap and replaced with a fresh egg for luring in another victim.

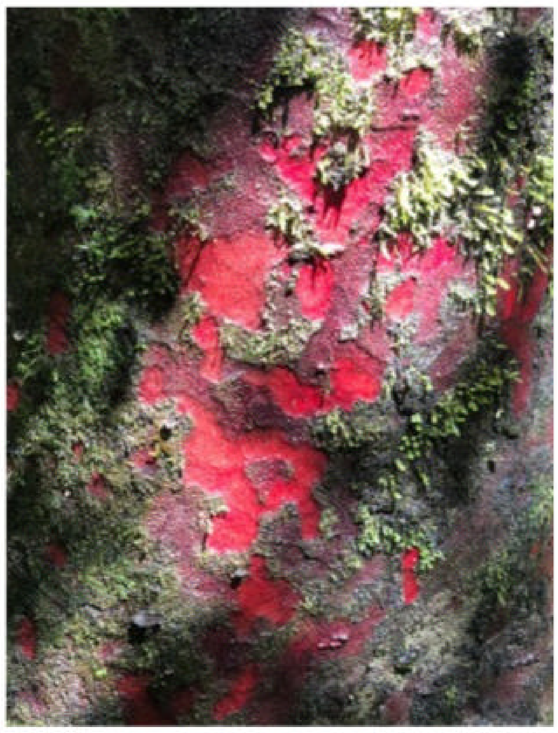
The pair also have exciting news to share: they have recently seen Fiordland crested penguins at the bouldered bay we're heading to.

Bard doesn't like to promise a penguin sighting. The Fiordland crested is one of our rarest penguin species and they're more or less gone by the second week of December, so nabbing an early season booking is essential if you really want to spot one. I really want to spot one.

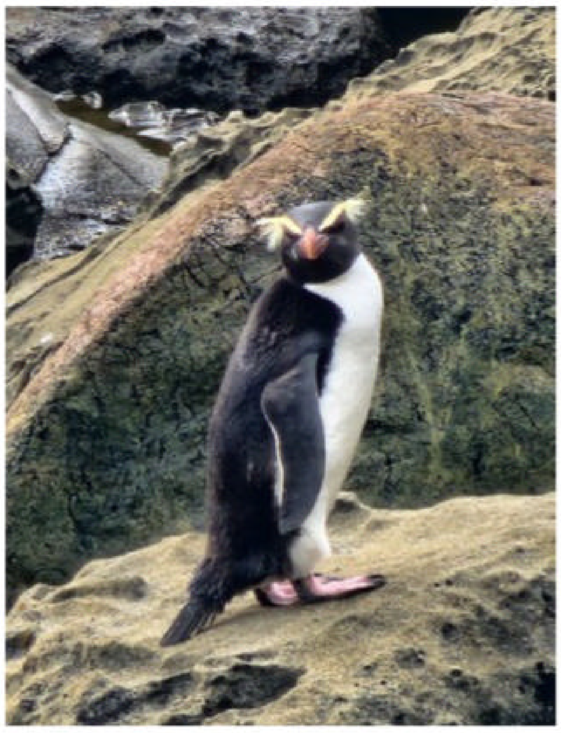
We see one right away on the shoreline, sunning itself on a rock. I'm elated, but it turns out that's nothing. Once we head up into the bush above the rocks, we discover a small group congregating just off the track — they come up here to mate apparently, and as long as you're very slow and quiet, they won't run away from you, but rather waddle about looking amusingly disgruntled, their arched yellow crests like eyebrows drawn into a scowl. In the water, the Fiordland crested is surprisingly small and sleek — bobbing about with tiny duck-like heads, they look nothing like the stout waddling creatures they are on land.

The morning of day four is spent with a final walk through the sand dunes to the McKenzie's homestead at Martins Bay, where the family settled after finally accepting that Jamestown was a lost cause.

The blood-red bark of a mataī in the podocarp forest — total photo-bait.



PHOTOS GEM PRITCHARD, ABOVE, TESS NICHOL, BELOW



It was important to stay still and quiet when we spotted the penguins so as not to spook them — difficult, as we were all very excited to see them.

The flood may have been the final straw. Two years after her failed excursion for milk, Margaret McKenzie went into labour for a fifth time. Heavy rain had been falling all week, and Lake McKerrow was rising rapidly. Her husband Daniel, either unwilling or unable to assist with the birth, jumped into his boat to fetch Mrs Robertson, the postman's wife, who lived several miles away in the lower Hollyford and was the nearest woman to Jamestown, the McKenzies being the last family left in the failed settlement.

> The penguins look amusingly disgruntled, their arched yellow crests mimicking a scowl.

But the rain was too heavy and the night too rough. Mrs Robertson refused to make the trip back with him. By the time Daniel arrived home, his house was flooded by at least a foot, and the child had already been born.

Margaret McKenzie had given birth, alone, on a bed surrounded by lake water, afraid the house would be washed away. She refused her husband's offer to move her to higher ground, saying she'd stay in the bed with her newborn unless the water reached her mattress. "I can well remember seeing her," wrote Alice McKenzie of her mother in her memoir, *Pioneers of Martins Bay*. "Sitting up in bed with her dark, curly hair hanging over her shoulders, smiling and looking quite happy in spite of the awful surroundings as she held up her baby son for me to see." The family left soon after, settling in Martins Bay in 1879. By 1882, Jamestown was completely abandoned.

Despite the hardships, Margaret McKenzie and her family would consider themselves most blessed: none of them died at Jamestown. Others fared much worse, suffering from starvation along with other hardships. One family, the Webbs, lost five of their seven children before they decided to leave Jamestown for good.

One thing has been established clearly over the last four days: the Hollyford could be a terrible place for a 19th-century European settler. But by the time we leave after lunch by helicopter, following the coast to Milford Sound where the bus is waiting to take us home, something else has been proven: for a 21st-century visitor, furnished with all the comforts a tour company can provide, this place is something close to paradise. ■

—

Tess Nichol is *North & South*'s deputy editor. She travelled a guest of the Hollyford Wilderness Experience. See hollyfordtrack.com for more information.

PHOTOS RAY HORRELL

Sketching out Queenstown

Armed with a sketchbook and a healthy appetite, our adventurer samples Queenstown.

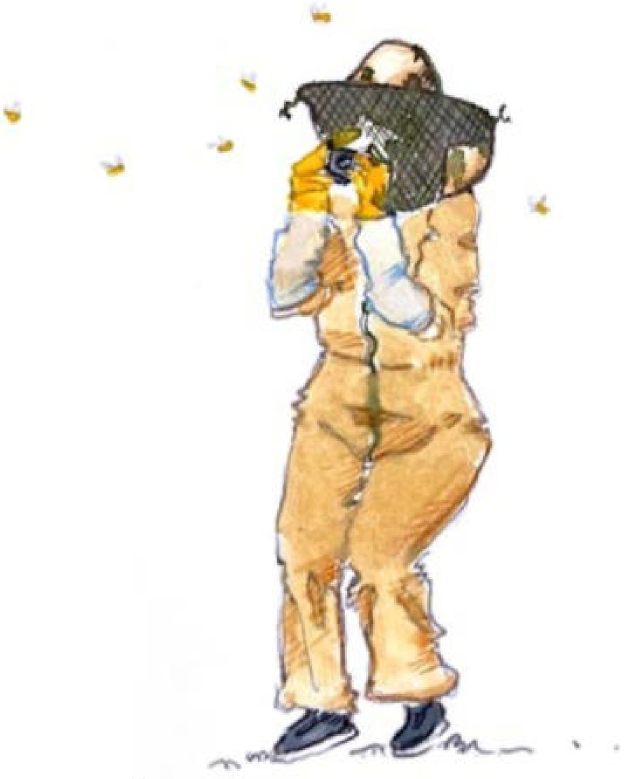
Story and illustrations by Imogen Greenfield

Tuesday

Looking out the window on my flight to Queenstown, I am curious to see the place after an extended absence. I have never spent long there. The first time I visited, I ended up in a car accident (long story — I survived, rescued by the Te Anau Women's Hockey Team) and the second time I was just passing through after walking the Routeburn, in serious need of some carb refuelling.

The town was always bustling, filled with a mixture of bumbling tourists and patient locals. Of course, the pandemic did a bit of a number on that, but nearly three years on from the day the borders first snapped shut, Queenstown seems to be finding its footing again.

Arriving at Queenstown airport (after the longest flight I've taken post-pandemic) our group is greeted by our host from the Oaks Resort at the edge of Lake Wakatipu. We gather our luggage and drive to our home for the next few days.



Queenstown outfit #1 — they like to dress you up down South, this time as a beekeeper.

My room is the size of a bloody mansion. I live in a modest little apartment in Auckland. This feels like Buckingham Palace, if more modestly decorated. Oaks Queenstown Shores Resort have this year undertaken a big renovation project to update their suites — once finished (they were nearing completion at the end of 2022) the choice of accommodation options will include suites which can be "joined up" to cater to families and large groups, and all rooms have been spruced up with new furnishings. Before I have a chance to swing my proverbial cat around, we are whisked away to our Be-a-Beekeeper and honey-spinning experiences in Frankton.

Nick, our host at honey centre Buzzstop, seems to run it all — and to have his bees well trained. Fully decked out in bee-keeping attire, we somewhat nervously gather round the humming hives while Nick talks us through the secret lives of honey bees.

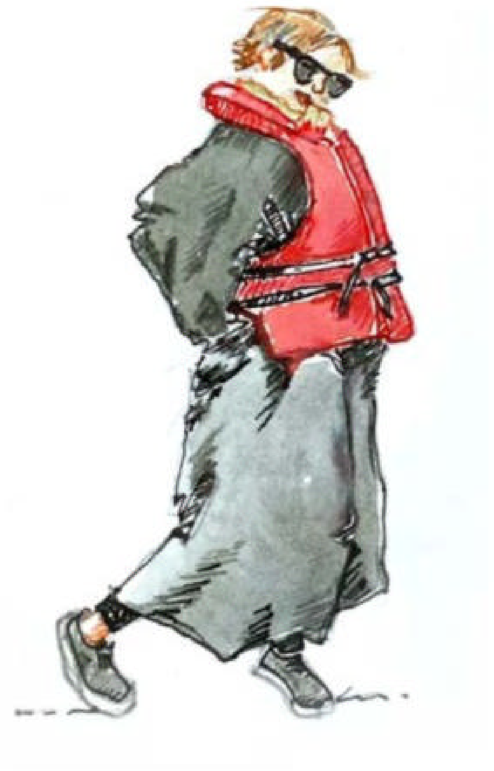
They are fascinating creatures, first introduced to New Zealand by Mary Bumby, the sister of a Methodist missionary. When she landed in the Hokianga, Bumby rolled to shore two wine barrels custom-fitted to transport the bees all the way from Ol' Blighty. Yes, Aotearoa does have its own native bees, but none produce honey.

As is obvious from our mānuka exports, the honey bees have done rather well here. We all leave with a customised pot of honey and a great deal more knowledge about this industrious insect.

We return to Oaks for a generous degustation dinner prepared by Oak and Vine Wellington's chef, who flew the salmon down with him.

Wednesday

It's an early start down at the Frankton Marina, where we are to board the KJet boat for a journey down the Shotover and Kawarau rivers. From yawning over the still lake when on shore, I am quickly jolted into a more conscious state as we whizz down the river at some too-early-to-calculate speed, with no one but our group on the water. It's a thrilling way to start the day and see the eye-watering beauty of this part of Te Wai Pounamu.



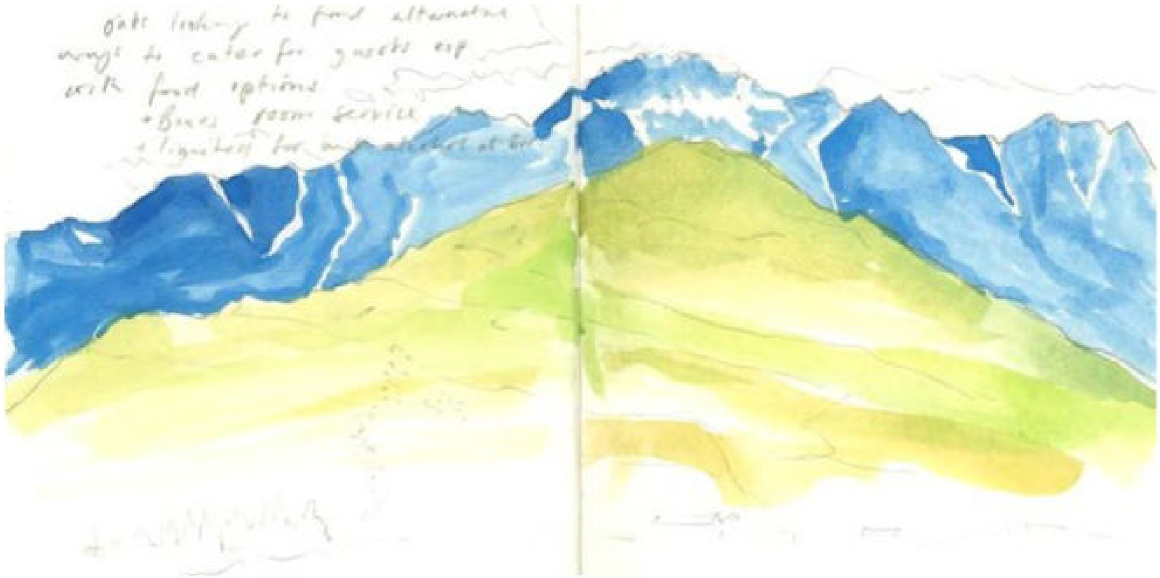
Outfit #2: KJet's no-water-is-going-to-get-through-this raincoat plus lifejacket.

Back on shore and with slightly wobbly legs we head to The Boat Shed Café just down from the jetty for coffee and something to line our stomachs: Delicious cheese scones, coffee 8/10.

As we wipe away the crumbs, the flash Altitude Tours minibus swings by. Piled into the back, we're handed another menu. We're heading to lunch at Kinross winery in the Gibbston Valley, and a few wine tastings in the vicinity.

Our bubbly host, Dahlia from Australia (imagine that said to rhyme), greets us with an exuberant smile and switches on the tour's instruction video. It's a riot: I learn a new word — "necking", which apparently has an additional meaning to the old-fashioned expression for what the kids would now call "making out". It's a term for sculling back your vino, which is not recommended for an optimal tour experience.

Starting off at Gibbston Valley Winery, with its famous wine cave, we next head to Kinross where


Oaks looking to find alternative
ways to cater for guests esp
with food options
+Boxes room service

our host introduces me to my new favourite pinot noir by Coal Pit.

Nearby Mt Rosa Wines is everything charming about the south: puppies, sequins and an antique pottery jug for a spittoon. Last on our tour was Stoneridge Estate, tucked in beside Lake Hayes. In a setting abundant with blossom, I could have sat by the vines until evening.

But we must be off — this time to Arrowtown. To fill in time before dinner, we visit the historic Chinese settlement site, a sad eye-opener regarding the living conditions for early Chinese who came in pursuit of gold.

We arrive at Benedix Stables — cute, cosy, lots of nooks — on the dot of our booking time. After a day of wine and a big lunch at Kinross, we try for a light dinner of sharing plates. I manage a taco and the beetroot salad. It's great food.

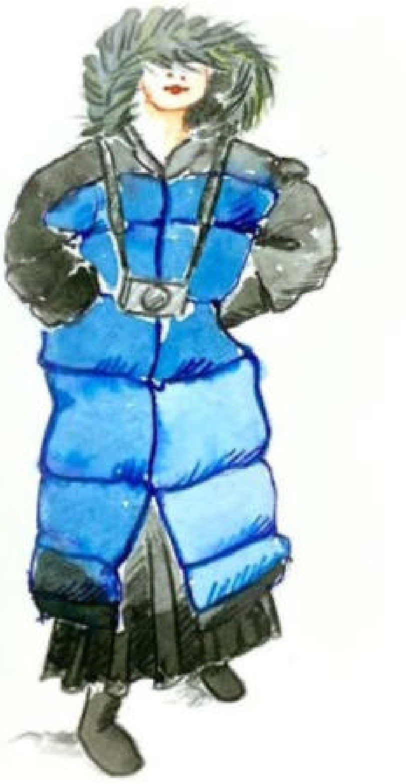
Back at Oaks Resort I crawl, exhausted, into my king-size bed.

Thursday

Warning: the weather around these parts can be deceptive. A sunny day in Queenstown does not mean the same in Milford Sound, one of the wettest parts of the country. Unfortunately, this meant our Milford Sounds experience was cancelled. Instead, I rally some of our team to walk into town where we have a make-up gondola ride. The sprawling, crystal-clear views from the top of the hill are stunning.

At lake level, however, central Queenstown is currently in the midst of a bit of a makeover. The construction-site ambience is a little disappointing if you've flown down from Cone City (Auckland) for a break from the high viz and brain-numbing diggers and jack-hammers.

Still, hungry again, we head for a Fergburger in Shotover St — when in Rome, as they say. And it is worth the giant queue. Tip: take your burger down to the construction-free lakeside. Tip 2: though perhaps not in gale force winds (which suddenly start up out of nowhere. Did I mention the unpredictable weather?)



Outfit #3: Staying cosy in the -7°C to –14°C of Queenstown Ice Bar.

Leaning into the gale, the two of us left braving the elements walk back to hotel to try to counter the enormous calorie count accumulated so far on this trip.

After a short rest, it is time to board the taxi for our Ice Bar experience. Being well past 21, I was not exactly salivating over this one, but was completely won over. Our friendly host led us through a fun and inclusive experience, though you have to be happy to feel the cold for a bit. Great mocktails, too. In my newfound enthusiasm, I almost take out a tour-mate's eye smashing my glass after taking a shot (the latter activity being enthusiastically encouraged).

It was all just the ticket to get re-energised for another evening of imbibing and eating.

The Bunker, in the CBD, was fantastic: a(nother) degustation menu, with wine pairings, and probably my favourite meal of the trip. As you would expect from the name, this place has a dark, seductive ambience. Even though it is buzzing with patrons, it retains an intimate feel. The food prepared by executive chef and co-owner Ben Norfolk is delicious, though I wish I could see it more clearly (dark, seductive, remember?) as every dish brought out looks like a little artwork.

Tip: go here with a big appetite and lots of energy. I felt like I had been running a food and wine marathon for the last few days. We roll out of the Bunker at a fairly decent hour. Our Oaks host Jamie, who warns us of hefty taxi fares, forbids us from falling into any of the waiting cars and orders up our ride back to base.

After sloshing about in the back of the van, and with a little help from a tube of rehydration gel (a tip from a seasoned fellow traveller) I collapse into bed.

Next day's plane ride is quiet as we head back to our various homes. The banality of airline queues and silly little plastic-wrapped snacks suit my mood as I contemplate the rather long list of to-do's that wait for me.

I wonder also about how many yoga classes I can fit in this weekend to negate the number of calories I consumed in so short a time span.

Queenstown is ready for you this summer. But I would pair it with a selection of rigorous physical activities to balance out all that generous southern hospitality. ■

Imogen Greenfield is *North & South*'s art director. She travelled as a guest of Oaks Queenstown Shores Resort.

Small Town, Tall Tales

A return visit to the West Coast's tight-knit community of Blackball leads to only-in-New Zealand discoveries, stories and coincidences.

By John Woolf

ALL PHOTOS TESS NICHOL

A slow drive through Blackball in the late 1970s revealed an almost post-apocalyptic world. Unpainted houses , smoke drifting from chimneys in the morning fog, and no one to been seen. This tiny town, some 22 kilometres inland, up the Grey River valley from Greymouth on the South Island's West Coast, was dilapidated — but fascinating. The New Zealand Labour movement was born in Blackball, off the back of a successful 10-week strike in 1908 by coal miners demanding an extension of their "crib time" (what we'd now call a lunch break) from 15 minutes to 30, and a shortening of the working day from 10 hours to eight. Their history is recorded in the Museum of Working Class History, an outdoor museum on Blackball's main drag.

After my initial visit in the 70s, I found myself in Blackball again last year during a campervan trip around the South Island with my mate Mark, at a time when the country was mercifully (for me at least) free of overseas tourists. To my eye it was a town reborn, with many of the houses freshly painted, and even some new builds under construction. This is likely down to the tourist boom of the past couple of decades, further enhanced with the recent opening of the Paparoa Track, built as a memorial to the 29 men who died in the 2010 Pike River Mine disaster.

Mark and I stayed in the caravan park which is part of the town's main accommodation, known officially as "Formerly the Blackball Hilton"— the name was cheekily amended in response to the Hilton hotel chain's US lawyers 1992 letter, demanding the Blackball Hilton cease and desist from using the Hilton name. The letter is still proudly displayed on the hotel's bar.

In the morning, in search of breakfast, we wandered into Blackball's Inn and 08 Café, which promised sustenance for weary travellers. Chatting to the friendly barista behind the bar while his wife cooked our big-boy breakfasts, I asked, pointing to the salami-company premises opposite, whether he knew who had started Blackball Salami, a smallgoods company I'd be hearing about for a while. I was quite intrigued as to how a business in a tiny town in the middle of nowhere came to be producing high-quality salamis, and hoped to learn a bit more.

"Yes," he told me. "I do actually — it was me."

—

Pat Kennedy's father had owned the town's butcher shop, and when he was 14 years old, Kennedy was taken out of high school to help with the family business. When Kennedy got his driver's licence at 15, he began delivering meat around the streets of Blackball and surrounding settlements in a van with a set of scales in the back, selling to housewives who would come outside to the van carrying a kitchen plate — which is how it was done in those days, he says.

By 1980, Kennedy's father had passed on the shop to him, and by 1984 he was tinkering with salami recipes. The first batch was a complete disaster, Kennedy says. "Solid as a rock, so tough the only way to eat it was to grate it."

That was the end of it. Kennedy and his new bride, Jane Wells, sold the shop and took off to Australia, later travelling through Southeast Asia before touring England, Scotland and Ireland in a VW Kombi

Formerly
THE BLACKBALL HILTON
HILTON

Parts of Blackball are still in dire need of a lick of paint, left, but the (formerly) Blackball Hilton, above, is thriving.

van. Kennedy notes they didn't taste a single salami during all that time away.

On returning to Blackball in 1989, Kennedy and Wells' son-in-law, Gary Secker, started making sausages from home kill in the garage of a stone house on a farm the couple owned. Despite the initial disaster of some 10 years earlier, sausage-making turned to experimental salami-making. Kennedy and Secker would dry the finished salamis by hanging them from number 8 fencing wire strung across the kitchen ceiling.

When they had a batch ready, Kennedy would slice them up and take them down to the pub for the customers to try. West Coasters being an honest lot, he received a frank assessment of which ones they liked, which was helpful during the refining phase.

First the customers at the pub, then other locals started putting in orders. Then word got out, and strangers from out of town arrived in search of salami, with stories like "My doctor told me you make some excellent salamis". In 1992, Kennedy and Secker bought back Kennedy's old butcher's shop, and began to make cured meats full time.

Wells says Secker and her husband were "completely obsessed" by salami. "Thinking salamis, talking salamis, and dreaming bloody salamis." By the time Kennedy sold the business in 2006, it was a million-dollar-a-year company. Blackball Salami is still in production and sold nationally.

—

Next door to Formerly the-Blackball Hilton is the Museum of Working Class History. I discover that the film maker Paul Maunder, best known for *Sons for the Return Home* and whom I used to know back in Wellington in the 1990s, is one of the people behind it.

The efficient small town grapevine soon has Maunder arriving for a chat with a cheery: "John", as if no time had passed.

Maunder tells me that after we fell out of touch he joined future Green MP Sue Bradford's community theatre group, touring the country with a play critiquing the impact of unemployment in New Zealand. They played the Hilton on a Saturday night, which is when he first met Jane Wells, who was involved in local events to promote the hotel, which she had bought with a friend.

"A few small towns have a bit of a special energy about them, and I reckon this is one of them," says Maunder. He kept coming back for holidays, helping Wells with projects like annual May Day celebrations. The offer, via a friend of a friend, of a fixer-upper home for just $10,000 at the turn of the millennium changed Maunder and his partner Carolyn Selwood's status from visitors to residents.

He's since set up a local community theatre group, which puts on an annual open-air classic play every January down at the old miners' bathhouse, and he runs the annual Blackball Readers and Writers Festival.

Maunder is also proud of being on the committee which set up and ran the centenary celebrations of the 1908 strike — more than 300 people attended.

The Pike River disaster in 2010 hit the community hard. Doing what he could, Maunder helped set up "the wheel" (of remembrance) at the museum, inviting the families of the victims to visit and make a commemorative clay plaque to their loved one, on site, which was then mounted on the wheel.

Too soon it is time for him to go — he's the volunteer driver for the community ambulance tonight. A firm handshake and he is gone. ■

—

John Woolf is a Wellington-based freelance writer.

GETTING SAUCY

Food editor Alice Taylor saves the best for last with a post-barbecuing marinade that works with just about anything coming off the grill.

Photos by James Mack

With summer now in full swing, this column stays on that wavelength. I hope that most of you got to put your feet up and relax with family over the Christmas break (and that others of you are still at the beach or bach as you're reading this) after what has been, for so many of us, a hectic year.

While I love my job, I know I appreciated the chance to have a few nice long sleep-ins and to recover from what has been the craziest year of my life.

The back-garden barbecue is a staple of "dad-cooking" throughout the country, and my dad loves his barbecue even more than most. When I was growing up, literally anything in our household that could be cooked would get a turn on the barbecue.

Leftovers have been reheated, sauces reduced, sandwiches toasted. I am clearly my father's daughter because I have in my time baked several cakes on our barbecue — and with great success, I might add.

One of the great joys of a good barbecue is that it makes cooking quick and easy. However, a lot of barbecue recipes require marinating the meat hours or even a day in advance, meaning you need to plan ahead. This is totally at odds with the barbecue's attraction as a perfect appliance for last minute entertaining. Often I don't even know that I'm hanging out with or cooking for loved ones until right before they come over.

A technique I love to use, called post-marinating, takes away all of that pre-planning stress. I first encountered the idea of marinating meat *after* cooking from Nigella Lawson — and Nigella has never done me wrong.

Her dressing was a very simple

The bread rolls pictured opposite are made from a brioche recipe Alice has developed herself. Her technique means the dough is ready to use in under an hour — but that's a story for another column.

olive oil and lemon marinade, though I love to use a salsa verde, a green sauce (verde meaning green in Spanish) that can include whatever herbs you might have on hand. Salsa verde can be brushed on to whatever meat, fish, or vegetable you have grilled. At Baduzzi we have used it with sardines and, more recently, beef tongue (which probably wouldn't be the biggest hit at an all-ages back-garden barbeque, to be fair).

Rather than serving meat with a sauce on the side, I find that if you cover the meat in the marinade right after grilling, the meat becomes more tender as it rests, and the heat from the just-cooked meat on the salsa verde lifts its flavours. When salsa verde is warmed and mixed with the meat's resting juices, oh my word, it is delicious.

My favourite way to use this marinade is drizzled over a split chicken, served with potato salad.

I also love it with steak in sandwiches. Serve with some sourdough bread, mayonnaise, caramelised onions and iceberg lettuce. It's also great over grilled prawns in a taco.

If you're vegetarian, you can elevate mushrooms or eggplant by dressing them in the marinade. I love to split an endive in half, grill it on the barbeque, then dress it in salsa verde and toss over some crunchy walnuts and cheese.

A salsa with a mixture of basil, parsley and a sprig of rosemary is my preference, but use whatever you have on hand. Mint works well, and so does rocket.

You can also add some finely chopped black or green olives if you like. If you don't eat anchovies then just remove them, however they add the most delightful, rich and salty flavour. ■

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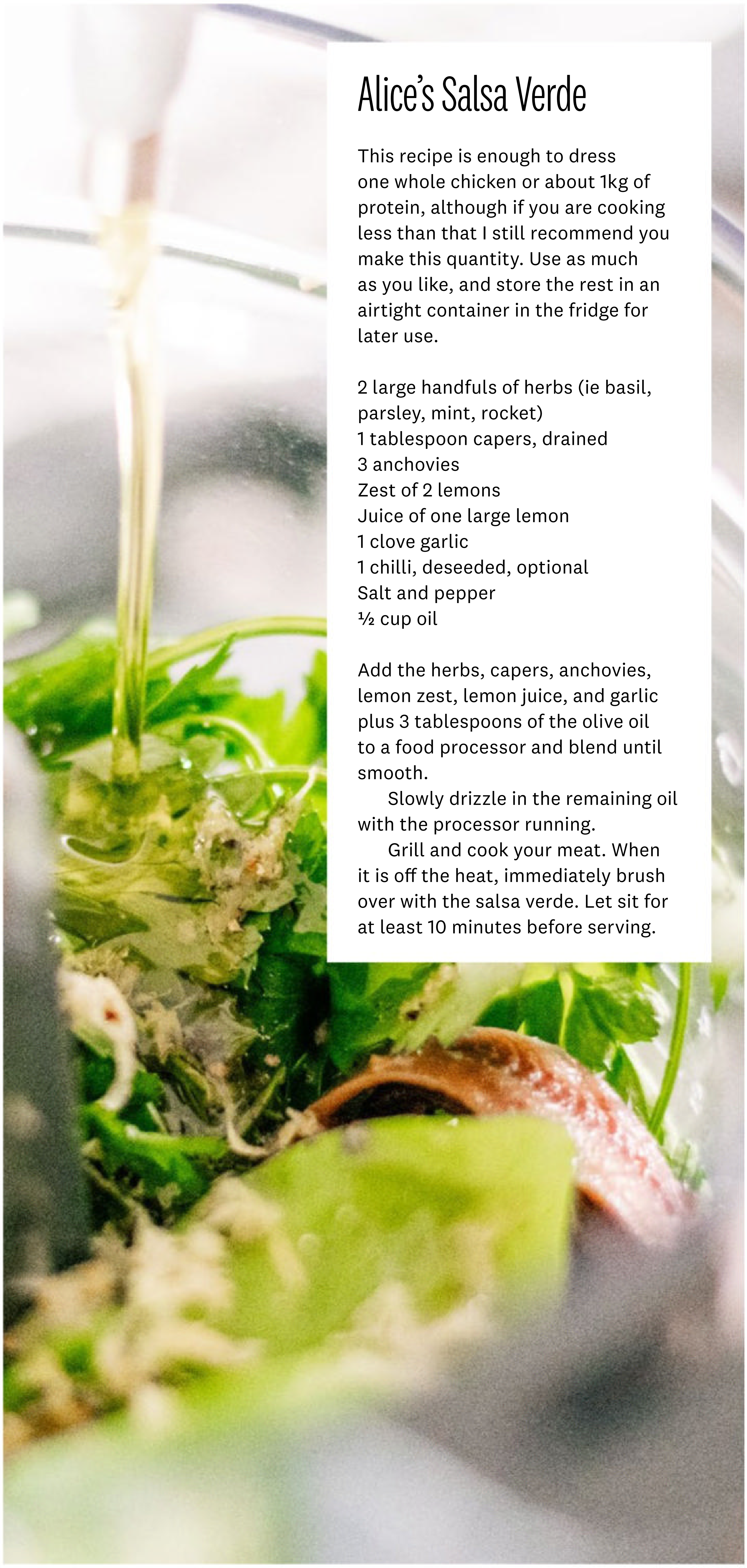
Alice Taylor is *North & South*'s food columnist.



Alice's Salsa Verde

This recipe is enough to dress one whole chicken or about 1kg of protein, although if you are cooking less than that I still recommend you make this quantity. Use as much as you like, and store the rest in an airtight container in the fridge for later use.

2 large handfuls of herbs (ie basil, parsley, mint, rocket)
1 tablespoon capers, drained
3 anchovies
Zest of 2 lemons
Juice of one large lemon
1 clove garlic
1 chilli, deseeded, optional
Salt and pepper
½ cup oil

Add the herbs, capers, anchovies, lemon zest, lemon juice, and garlic plus 3 tablespoons of the olive oil to a food processor and blend until smooth.

Slowly drizzle in the remaining oil with the processor running.

Grill and cook your meat. When it is off the heat, immediately brush over with the salsa verde. Let sit for at least 10 minutes before serving.

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BOOKS

Edited by
PAUL LITTLE

STRAIGHT UP

by Ruby Tui
Allen & Unwin — $36.99

The most successful celebrity memoirs work when the trajectory is that of a difficult start in life followed by a period of floundering and searching culminating in massive success which must be due to the subject's hard work against all the odds. Willie Apiata's tough early years, Michael Hill's house fire or Ray Avery's homeless childhood all hewed to this pattern.

Black Ferns star and national heroine Ruby Tui's story sticks to the template, sort of. Life actually didn't start out too bad. She had two parents who loved her and each other, but Dad's drinking got in the way. There was violence, substance abuse and mental health struggles, but there was also a mother who never gave Tui reason to doubt that she was loved and valued. Her bicultural Palagi-Samoan heritage could have made things complicated, but she was equally treasured by both sides of her family.

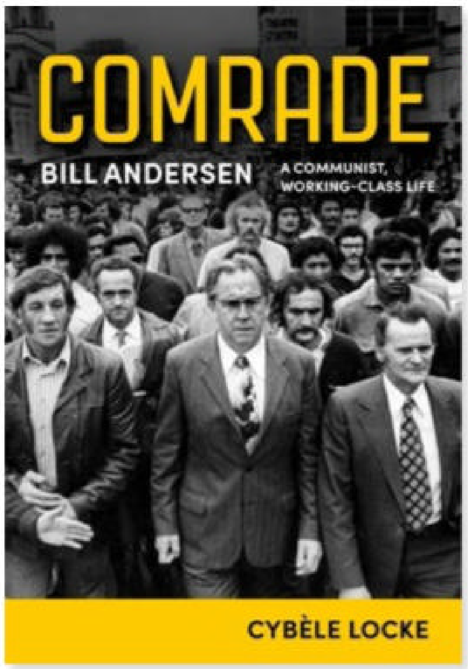
As for finding what she could do to get ahead in life, there was never any question. "I wanted a purpose", and she found it in sport. She was a natural, excelling at anything physical. Rugby was merely the one on which she landed.

The book also has all the behind-the-scenes and on-the-field detail a fan could want. There are glimpses into rugby politics which show it to be just as tawdry as you'd imagine and there are gripping accounts of torturous trainings sessions. It's clear you would not get very far complaining to Tui about a paper cut.

Who can resist writing that includes the likes of "Holy, I thought. That's so buzzy!" which she exclaims when she learns that a song she loves is one her father used to sing to her in utero? She keeps it simple, as when she sums up: "Love, greatitude, communication. These are my values." (Greatitude is gratitude-plus.)

Despite being well written, the pithy little morals with which each chapter concludes are superfluous — the points she wants to make are clear enough without needing to be motto-fied.

Tui describes particularly well what it's like living between two worlds. It's not a trial. It's a source of strength, with double the lessons to be earnt, absorbed and put into practice. Some people in this position feel they don't belong anywhere. Tui's wonderfully supportive family made sure she felt like she belonged wherever she was.



COMRADE: BILL ANDERSEN – A COMMUNIST, WORKING-CLASS LIFE

by Cybèle Locke
Bridget Williams Books — $49.99

Younger readers may need some help with the words in the subtitle of Locke's exemplary biography of Bill Andersen (1924–2005). "Working class" and "communist" are not used with the abandon of days gone by, but they adequately sum up the life of commitment led by one of our greatest union leaders.

The communist label was once frequently applied to people even slightly left of centre, but Andersen was a committed member of a communist party and believer in the ultimate triumph of the political philosophy and of the proletariat. This did not eventuate in his lifetime nor has it in the years since.

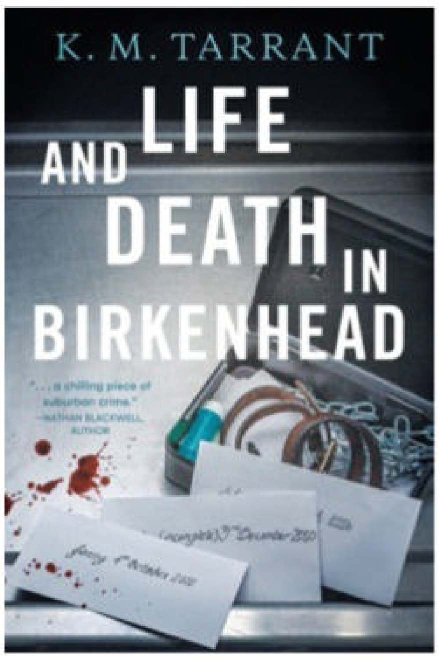
But for Andersen and other workers' champions of the 20th century, this belief provided the underpinning of their efforts to improve the lot of their fellow man.

Man. Women, not so much. Nor other minorities. The class struggle has been replaced today by identity struggle. Locke records how Andersen — Bill, as she always calls him in comradely style — came to see that causes other than those of white working-class males also fit the struggle.

At 17 he was elected secretary of the Kauri Timber Company Employees Union. Time spent crewing on British ships during World War II exposed him to petty class distinctions, honed his awareness of injustice and confirmed his communist views.

As a union leader, Andersen refused to earn more than the people he represented, and when the opportunity arose to buy a house by capitalising on his family benefit (a government payment to help parents with children's expenses) he refused to, because he did not believe in owning private property.

For those who remember Andersen as a public figure but didn't know much about him, this thorough and always readable biography will fill in gaps of knowledge about a man who at one time was a frequent fixture on the national stage. For those who weren't alive to remember him, it will be salutary to learn that such people really did exist.



LIFE AND DEATH IN BIRKENHEAD

by KM Tarrant
Mary Egan Publishing — $35

Gerald Stafford, a central figure in this novel, is one of those criminals whose apprenticeship consists of torturing animals, which case studies show is a precursor to an adulthood of sadistic iniquity. In his case, guinea pigs are his — well, guinea pigs. In later life, his tendencies find an outlet thanks to his employment as an embalmer for a large funeral home.

For the purposes of her plot, Tarrant links this tendency with the current fashion for DCs or direct cremations, in which the deceased is taken straight from the point of death to the cremator with no maudlin family involvement in between. It's an excellent way for someone with certain tendencies to interfere with and dispose of a body undetected, although not necessarily a great way for a family to process its grief.

Aided by fellow funeral director Wes, playing Igor to his Dr Frankenstein, Gerald violates the bodies by inflicting on them the injuries of famous murder victims of the past, such as those of Jack the Ripper. Then he uploads the videos to the internet. Well, that's what it says here.

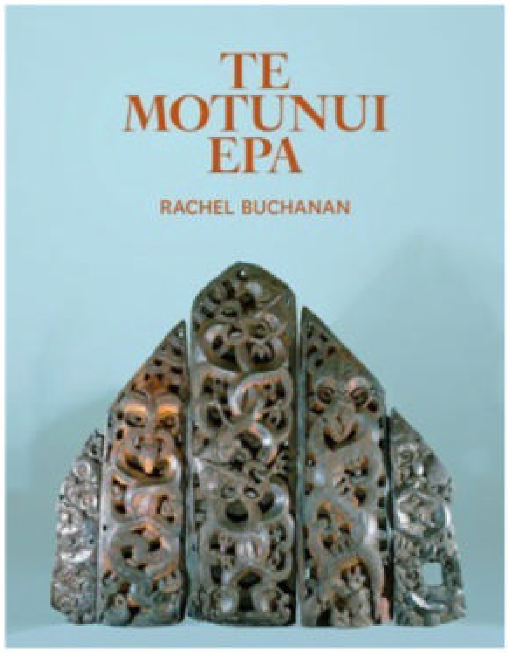
Other firsts in these pages include what must be the only known case — in fiction or otherwise — of a large funeral home closing for a few days due to bereavement.

Stafford also practises meditation, raising the question of what did meditation ever do to be dragged in and tainted by association with these behaviours?

With her sadistic, psychopathic, serial-killing central figure, Tarrant appears to be trying to do for embalmers — her former profession — what Thomas Harris did for psychotherapists and Alfred Hitchcock for motel owners. But Stafford has neither the charm of Hannibal Lecter nor the little-boy-lost appeal of Norman Bates. As we have seen, however, he has something of the theatrical flair of Pennywise.

The most interesting review of this competent but eccentric book will almost certainly be the one that appears in *Funeralcare* magazine, distributed free to among others, members of the New Zealand Embalmers Association.

FEATURE BOOK REVIEW



A TAONGA'S LONG VOYAGE

Not so much a book as a cornucopia — Rachel Buchanan's scrupulously illustrated text detailing the loss, retrieval, subsequent loss and ultimate restoration to its homeland of the Motunui epa is a rich assemblage of various kinds of narrative.

It is assembled from diverse sources, not unlike the five carving panels themselves which, as explained early on: "come from at least two and perhaps three different pātaka and were probably made by several different tohunga whakairo from several different tōtara trees between 1750 and 1820".

Then things got really complicated. The epa, "the same size as the side of a small car", were hidden in a Taranaki swamp circa 1820 to protect them from invaders, discovered by accident in 1971, sold to a dealer who exported them to New York, where they were sold to the Bolivian tin-mining heir George Ortiz, who tried to sell them at Sotheby's to repay the ransom money his mother lent him when his daughter was kidnapped in 1977. That sale was prevented and there ensued — as recounted here — complicated and numerous efforts at law and diplomacy to have them returned to New Zealand, which happened only in 2014.

Out of this tightly woven fabric,

Buchanan unpicks numerous threads for our inspection. Not the least interesting is the insight into the world of international connoisseurship. Ortiz's family, for instance, collected not only impressionist and old master paintings but also, ahem, golf memorabilia. He considered himself "the greatest collector of ancient art in the world". And he was passionate about Pacific art, which led him into numerous compromises, such as the made-up provenance that was fabricated when he acquired the epa in the first place.

Much of the story is told from the point of view of the epa. The voices of the ancestors lament their state as they find themselves hidden away in everything from the original swamp to limbo in Sotheby's storage to six years in the extraordinary Geneva Freeport, a maximum-security Swiss warehouse where items of value are concealed from prying eyes and legal authorities.

> Ortiz's family collected not only impressionist and old master paintings but also, ahem, golf memorabilia.

Buchanan does an excellent job of condensing complicated legal issues and lengthy legal proceedings into a few paragraphs. The question of who owns what pillaged cultural heritage is hardly unique to this country.

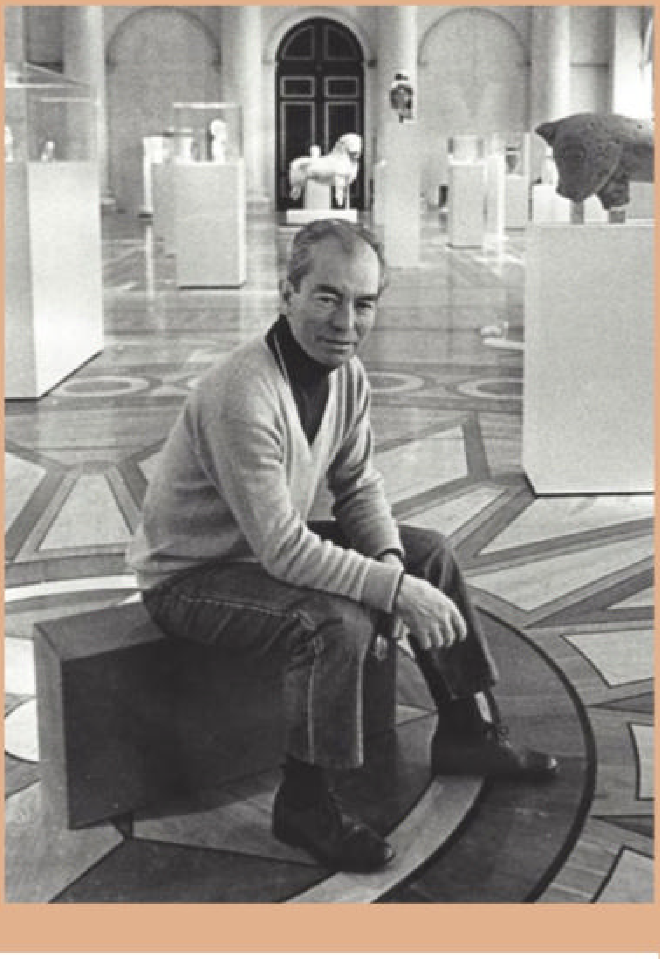
The New Zealand public service is a key player, frequently seen in its derring-do mode as it moves, for instance, to prevent the epa being auctioned at Sotheby's at the last minute.

Buchanan has marshalled her material into prose that frequently manages to be lyrical and economical at the same time but nearly always maintains narrative drive and suspense, especially when the epa are first removed from New Zealand.

Eventually, no one in the international art-industrial complex will have anything to do with the epa. They become like a cursed talisman in an Edgar Allen Poe story, that no one will touch because of the harm they bring. Only the death of George Ortiz liberates them. His family can't wait to get them off their hands for the $4.6 million the New Zealand government eventually paid.

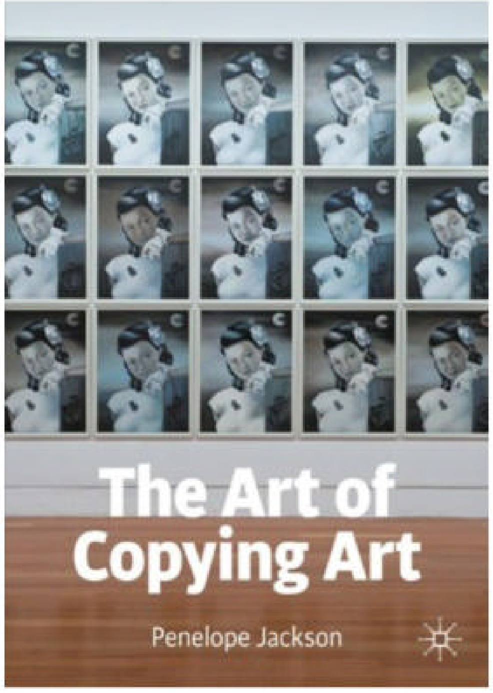
TE MOTUNUI EPA

by Rachel Buchanan
Bridget Williams Books — $49.99



Top: the Motunui epa lay for more than 150 years on this site. Many taonga were placed in swamps around here for preservation and safekeeping. It may even be said that this whenua is comparable to the storage rooms at The Louvre. Right: Collector George Ortiz. Below: Nicolas Ortiz (George Ortiz's son), centre, with New Zealanders Garry Nicholas, left, and Peter Moeahu in front of the Ortiz chateau, Geneva, in June 2014. The Kiwis came to accompany the epa home.

PHOTOS, TOP, RACHEL BUCHANAN COLLECTION, CENTRE, COURTESY GEORGE ORTIZ COLLECTION, BOTTOM, TE ARAWHITI (FORMERLY OFFICE OF TREATY SETTLEMENTS)



THE ART OF COPYING ART

by Penelope Jackson
Springer Nature Books – $44.99

The idea of copying in art carries a lot of connotations and nuances. There was a time, for instance, when art's primary job was seen to be copying nature. But it probably wasn't long after the first art was made that someone liked the look of something enough to copy it. Copying, from being a shady practice has a rich, respectable and fascinating history.

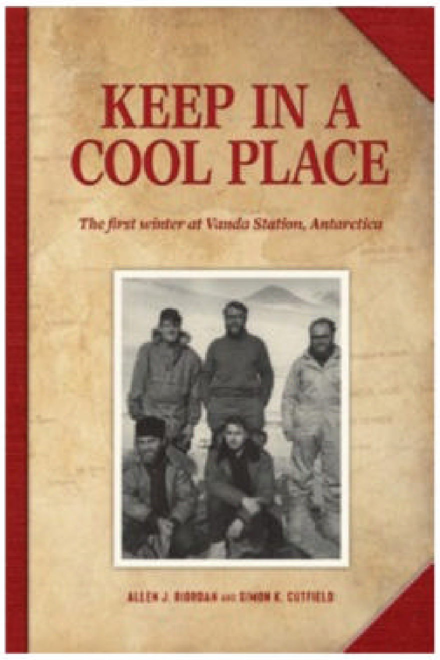
Penelope Jackson, who has the excellent book on New Zealand art crimes, *Art Thieves, Fakers and Fraudsters*, to her credit, has produced a comprehensive round-up of copying practices and processes through the centuries.

For a member of the art establishment, some of the former curator's views are surprisingly counter-intuitive. She is tolerant for instance of the Chinese old master factories that produce copies of venerable works to a high(ish) standard for wide distribution at bargain-basement prices. She examines the sexual politics of copying when would-be women artists had to make do with plaster cast copies of classical works as models from which to practise their drawing skills because they were not permitted to attend life drawing classes. The connection between two kinds of reproduction is there to be made.

Copies are also extremely useful because they fill in gaps in art history. There are many cases where, if copies had not been made of them at the time, we would not know the details of many lost works.

It's well known that there are many copies in public collections all over the world. Some are known and acknowledged copies and a point of pride for their galleries. Others are not recognised as copies and then discovered to be, which is potentially mortifying. Yet others are believed to be copies but then found to be genuine, resulting in a publicity windfall for the institution.

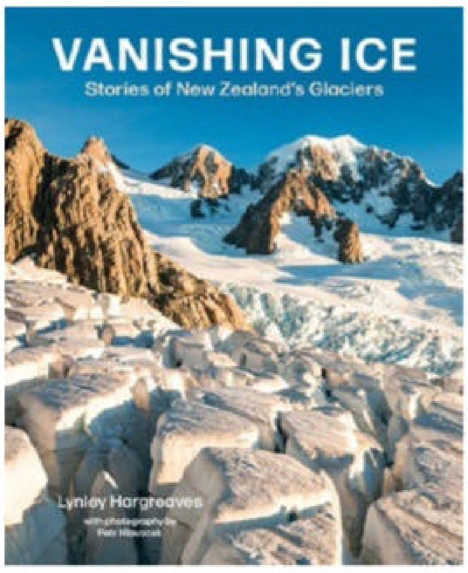
This is a surprisingly diverting read with opportunities on nearly every page for the reader to look up and say "Did you know that . . . ?" to their partner. Anyone remotely interested in the subject would be well advised to get themselves a copy.


KEEP IN A
COOL PLACE
The first winter at Vanda Station, Antarctica
ALLEN J. RIORDAN and SIMON K. CUTFIELD

KEEP IN A COOL PLACE: THE FIRST WINTER AT VANDA STATION, ANTARCTICA

by Allen J Riordan
and Simon K Cutfield
Canterbury University Press — $49.99

From much of Ed Hillary's writing to Jane Ussher's *Still Life*, the great southern continent has inspired numerous excellent books. This is not one of them. Some 50 years after the events recorded, Riordan (mainly) and Cutfield describe seven months at Vanda Station, on the shores of Lake Vanda, an Antarctic anomaly which boasts water temperatures of around 25°C at its lower depths. How and why this occurs was one of the subjects of the research that was part of their mission. Riordan was an American whose previous roughing-it experience extended no further than a couple of weeks camping in the woods. He is conspicuously unqualified for icy rigours, but the rich opportunities for humour this suggests do not bear fruit on these pages.



VANISHING ICE: STORIES OF NEW ZEALAND'S GLACIERS

by Lynley Hargreaves
Potton & Burton — $59.99

Once the great glaciers of the South Island were among the most prominent of the spectacular natural wonders that drew visitors here from around the world. But it has long been known that global warming has been shrinking them at a distressing pace. The glaciers — or rather, the places where the glaciers used to be — are among the most visible proofs of warming. If you haven't seen them by now you've really left it too late. Instead, we have this excellently produced book, which records their origins, heyday and fate. Some people are still drawn to look at the vistas of rubble that remain when the ice has retreated. Hopefully, they will be inspired to add to our so-far desultory efforts to face the challenge of climate change.

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Cryptic Across

1. Restless and apt to disappear (8)
5. Was it instrumental in developing the early Jumbo Boeing airliners? (4)
9. Insignificant let-down (5)
10. Join together in one tone, making for a comfortable experience (7)
11. Forces replaced what might have been one of Michelangelo's works (6)
12. The first letter? Bet on it, it's all the letters we've got (5)
14. The playwright as poltroon (6)
16. It's half psychology – oriental concept of the mind (6)
19. Exemplary design (5)
21. Military lackey who gets around with 25 (6)
24. Postpone the opening of Australian spectacle (7)
25. Bird that flits around with 21 (5)
26. Sent a letter, I'm told, repeating identical information (4)
27. Swindle Mr Winstone for a fish (8)

Cryptic Down

1. Farewell to the dell (4)
2. Small ridge is not cultivated (7)
3. Spells "provisos" (5)
4. Drink of the highest quality can be taken when travelling (6)
6. British floppy balloon (5)
7. Cut very serious in the end (8)
8. Standards took a slide (6)
13. CIA trims rebuilt Oriental cutter (8)
15. Outstanding (6)
17. Crawl semi-clad up to the traffic signal (7)
18. Appropriate? Bad? Bad enough; cut loose (6)
20. It's noted in the accounts: I'm in debt (5)
22. Italian city liberated in the course of capturing rebels (5)
23. Simply unique (4)

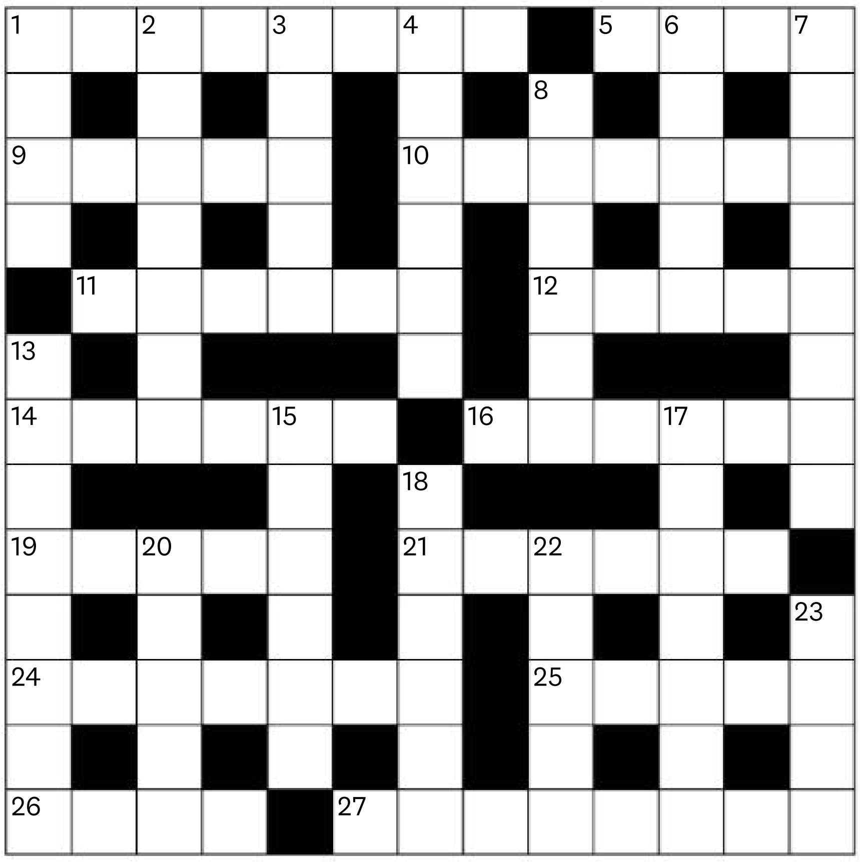
Quick Across

1. Guarantee
5. Incentive
9. Riddle
10. Boorish
11. Saturate
12. Leg bone
14. Sermon
16. Refrain
19. Open sore
21. Constabulary
24. Exhaust
25. Artfulness
26. Wander
27. Perfidy

Quick Down

1. Cried
2. Podium
3. Pinafore
4. Instructed
6. Vertically
7. Practise
8. Thwart
13. Jostle
15. Food store
17. Make good
18. Globe
20. Coconut crop
22. Light beer
23. Agreement

Cryptic



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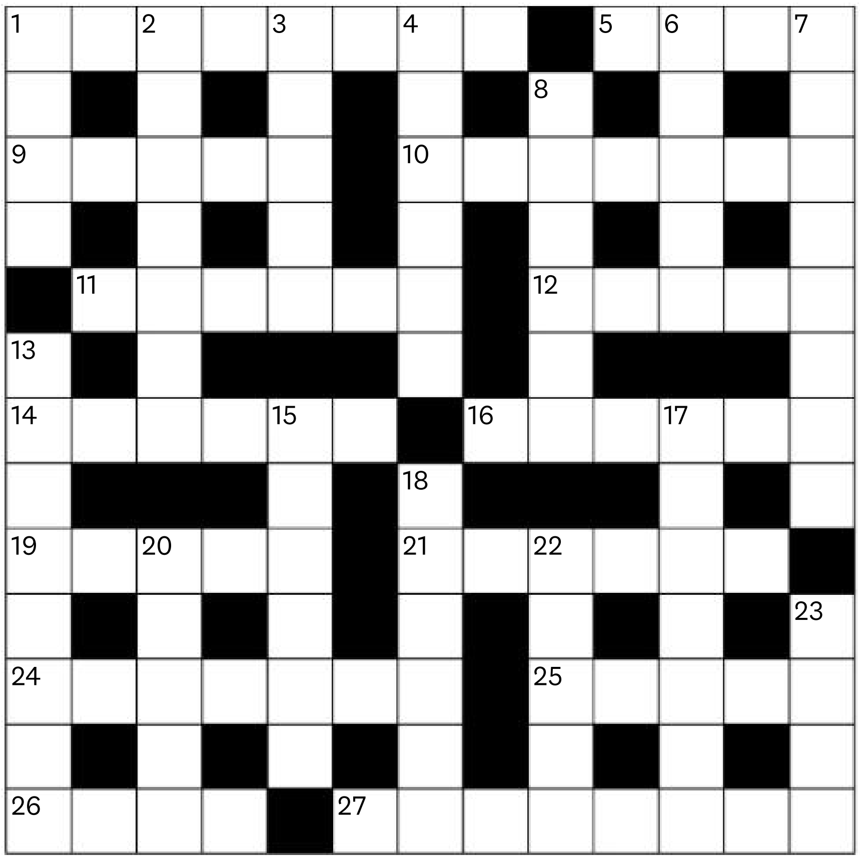
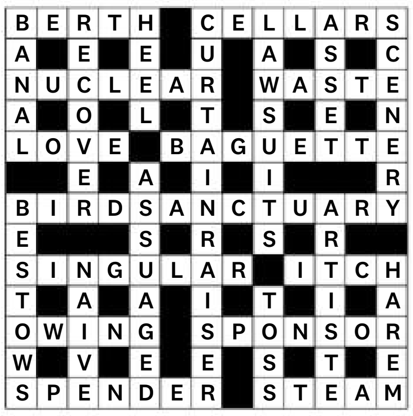


January Solutions . . .

Cryptic



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A	■	O	■	L	■	T	■	S	■	E	■	N
L	O	V	E	■	B	A	G	U	E	T	T	E
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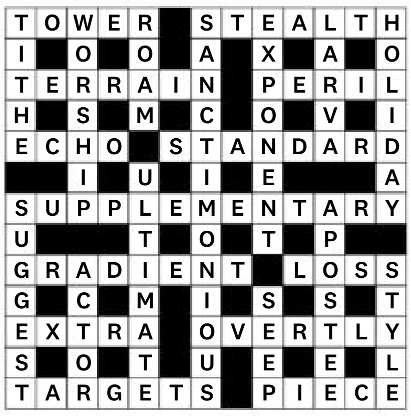

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WHIZ / / QUIZ

1. What is the connection between Elon Musk and businessmen Martin Eberhard and Marc Tarpenning?
2. Who captained the Australian Socceroos in their historic outing in Qatar?
3. What is the new name that the World Health Organisation has given to Monkeypox?
4. Who is Angela Alvarez?
5. If your male partner suffers from couvade, what's going on?
6. Which is the smallest state in the US by land area?
7. And which US city has the nickname Beantown?
8. What is hypnagogia?
9. What is measured by the Mercalli scale?
10. In which of his plays do Shakespeare's female characters Desdemona and Titania appear?
11. Who played Prince Philip in the early episodes of the Netflix series *The Crown*?
12. Who said: "Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever."

WHIZ QUIZ ANSWERS

1. Eberhard and Tarpenning incorporated Tesla Inc — originally Tesla Motors — in 2003. Musk became Tesla CEO and product architect in 2008. **2.** Matthew Ryan. **3.** mpox. The US government welcomed the WHO move, saying that "reducing stigma associated with disease is one critical step in our work to end mpox."
4. She is a 95-year-old Cuban-born American singer who shared the 2022 23rd Annual Latin Grammy Awards award with Mexican Silvana Estrada.
5. Couvade is "sympathetic pregnancy", where an expectant father feels the effects of carrying a baby and giving birth. **6.** Rhode Island, at 1214 square miles.
7. Boston. **8.** The twilight zone between wakefulness and sleep. **9.** The intensity of earthquakes.
10. Desdemona is in Othello, Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. **11.** Matt Smith. **12.** Mahatma Gandhi.

BAY OF ISLANDS

JUST THREE HOURS' DRIVE NORTH OF AUCKLAND, THE BAY OF ISLANDS IS PERFECT FOR A SUMMER GETAWAY.

The Bay of Islands is, frankly, one of the prettiest places in New Zealand, with its golden-sand beaches, historic buildings and smattering of tiny islands in the bay. The major towns, each with a unique character, are Russell and Paihia — both on the coast — and Kerikeri and Kawakawa, a little inland.

From Paihia, take one of five scenic walks, with something for different fitness levels. Boat cruises, which leave the Paihia wharf regularly, are a chance to see the bay's islands closer up. You might take a glass-bottom boat tour to the Hole in the Rock (effectively, an archway through the base of a small island) at the tip of Cape Brett.

If more adventurous activities appeal, go kayaking, swimming, snorkelling, or swimming with dolphins. Worked up an appetite? Charlotte's Kitchen, at the tip of Paihia wharf, has food as good as the views. To stay? The Paihia Beach Resort & Spa offers boutique, ocean-fronting suites with balconies; there's also a spa and a restaurant onsite.

You simply can't visit the Bay of Islands without catching the ferry across to Russell. You can feel the history as you walk past preserved colonial buildings and sites of historic interest. A walking-tour app tells you about the main attractions. Climb Flagstaff Hill for panoramic views. And there's no better place to stay than the historic Duke of Marlborough Hotel overlooking the shore; get fed and watered downstairs.

In Kawakawa, there's no missing the world-famous Hundertwasser public toilets, incorporating colourful sculptures and mosaics. They were designed by the celebrated Austrian artist, Friedensreich Hundertwasser, who spent much of his later life in Northland. Kawakawa is the only New Zealand town with a railway track running down the middle of its main street. It's still used by the Bay of Islands Vintage Railway. All aboard!

In Kerikeri, visit Te Ahurea, the interactive pā site formerly known as Rewa's Village, which was an original kainga and for some time a stockaded fortress. It's been reconstructed as an example of a pre-European kainga.

Stop by the Stone Store, New Zealand's oldest surviving stone building, which now sells arts, crafts, and ice creams. And taste test Makana Confections' hand-made chocolates.

Haruru, a small settlement three kilometres inland from Paihia, is best known for its spectacular waterfall, Haruru Falls.

Of course, picnicking on the beaches or swimming in sheltered bays is a must in fine weather. At the northern end of Paihia lies Te Tii Bay, a golden-sand beach lined with pōhutukawa trees.

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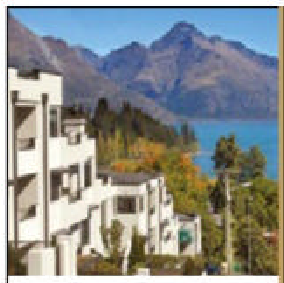

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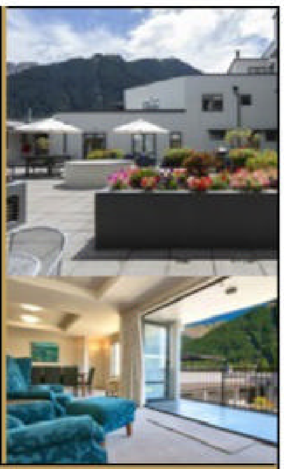

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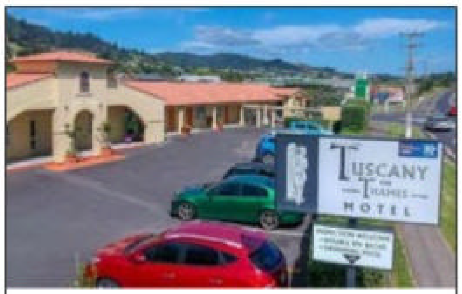

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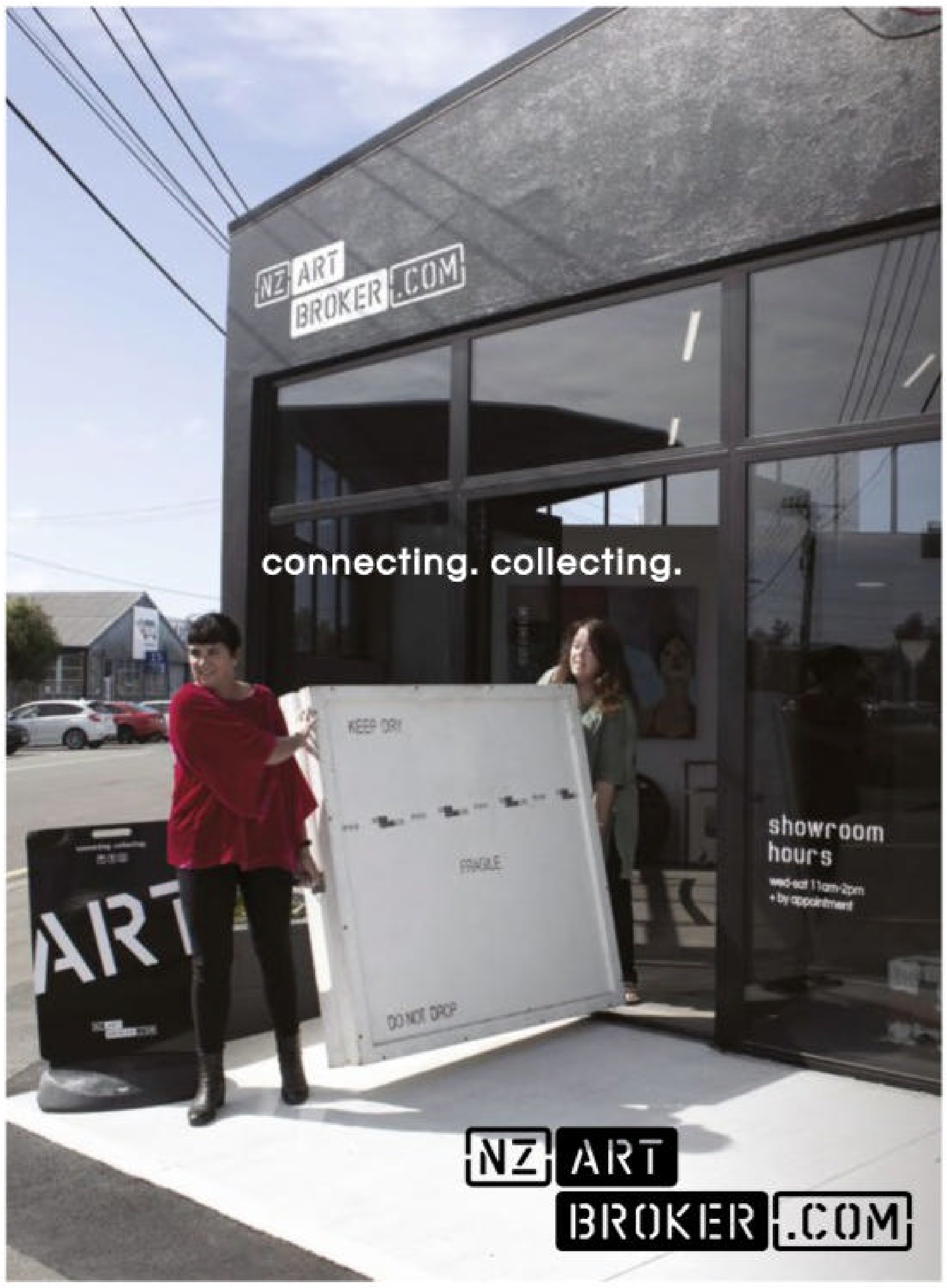

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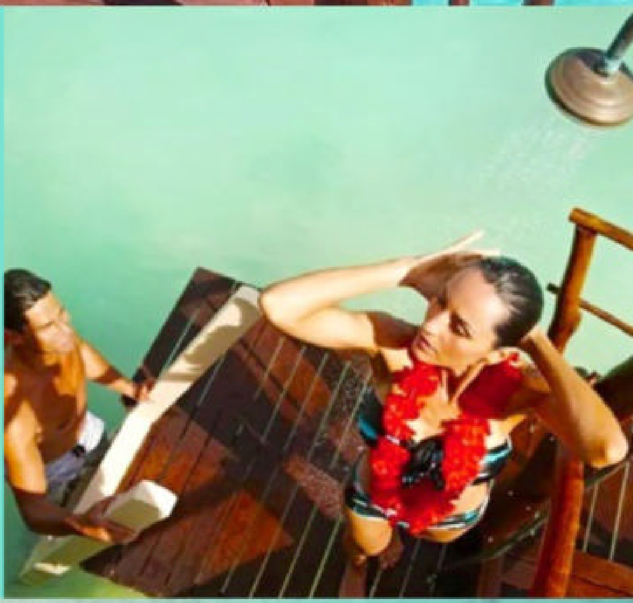

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ECHOES OF STORIES

Benjamin Work is an Auckland-born-and-raised artist with Tongan and Scottish heritage, who lives in east Auckland with his wife, Iaeli. Inspired by his research in museums across the globe, his paintings are intended to create new ways for viewers to engage with Tonga's visual language. Work's next exhibition is at the Canterbury Museum with Harrison Freeth in early 2023.

Photos by Vanessa Green

I have a studio that is based in Te Oro Music and Arts Centre in Glen Innes through an artist-in-residence programme. The name Te Oro was gifted by local iwi of the area. "Oro" is like a tonal reverberation or sound from within a chamber. Maungarei/Mt Wellington has natural lava caves which go under the maunga and down towards Te Wai Ō Taiki River. The wind used to move through the hollows and it would make this reverberating sound, or a sound within a chamber — this oro.

The name and narrative of the building reminds me of the privilege I have to be here on this whenua. My art practice has centred around a sense of place. Having been born and raised in east Auckland, it's really amazing to be in a studio space that is in my local area. We're next to the library and then there's the local marae, Ruapōtaka.

I share the studio with me, myself and I, which I really need. I do enjoy collaborating on projects, but to have a space on your own is special — you don't have to perform for anyone. It reminds me of being at school when the teacher walked past and you put your hand over the paper, like "Don't look!" For me the studio is a place of freedom to explore and to make mistakes privately, and those mistakes have the potential to be new and exciting work.

I'm in the workshop studio space at one end of the building, which is one big open space with one side of the studio all lined with windows facing east, so in the morning the sun rises and floods the studio. Inside there's a couch which I often have a little nap on — an important part of the process.

I have the studio quite open because I often paint on the ground and need the space. There are many threads to my work, but an ongoing theme throughout my practice is the idea of connectivity. Our connection to the environment and the world around us, both physically and spiritually. I've surrounded myself with images of inspiration and references around the walls, the visual languages which connect me to places which are important to me: Tonga, Scotland and Aotearoa. My work is communicating stories, and the images on the walls, they're symbols that I see as vessels, carrying stories of what was and is to come. In layman's terms I'm a storyteller.

I think our nation's going through some big changes; we're in an interesting time where we are trying to re-evaluate the story of Aotearoa. I've been working for about eight years as an artist. Before that I was consistently producing artwork but I worked day jobs. My wife was supportive of me making art full-time, although I don't know if I would use that phrase "full-time" — you're either an artist or you're not. If you are called to be an artist then you don't need a stamp of approval. ■

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